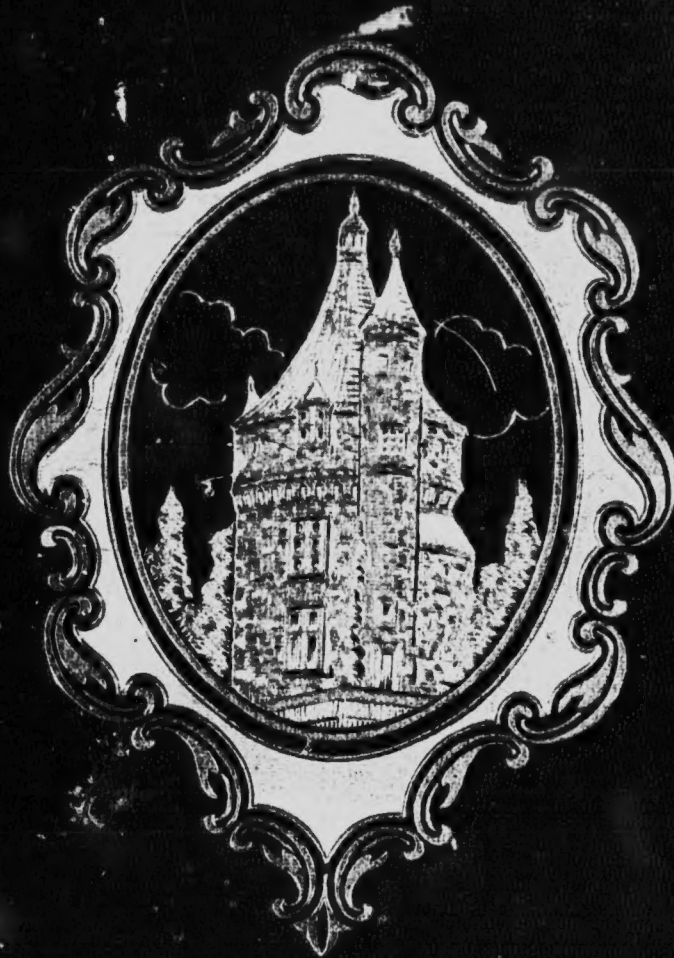


CHÂTEAU ROYAL

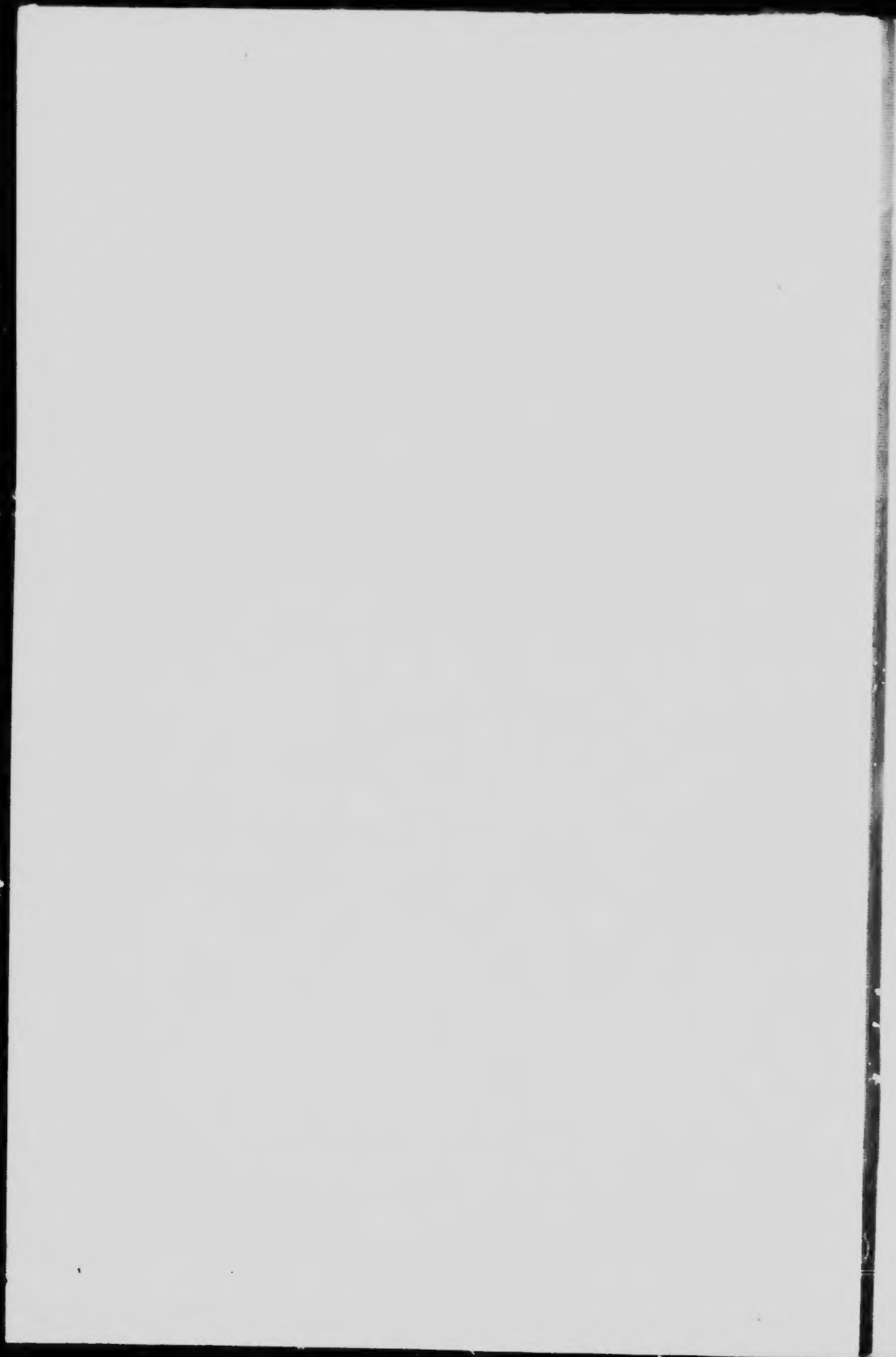


J. H. YOXALL



1750 .

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CHÂTEAU ROYAL

By the Same Author

ALAIN TANGER'S WIFE.

BEYOND THE WALL.

THE ROMANY STONE.

SMALILOU.

CHÂTEAU ROYAL

BY

J. H. YOXALL

"The age of Romance has not ceased; it never ceases; it does not, if we only think of it, so much as very sensibly decline."

CARLYLE, *The Diamond Necklace*.

Toronto

THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.

1908



CHÂTEAU ROYAL

I

OF Francis Benedick Stewart I tell—Dick Stewart, the young man in the story; and of what befell him in France two years ago.

Perceive him. Not the pale handsome hero, but ruddy and vital and vivid, a man's man; solid and wholesome though rapid and bright; garrulous, bubbling over with quip and quiz and exaggeration; frank and loyal, and winsome with good humour, if sometimes impetuous and often slangy; fine stuff not yet quite finished, but gentleman in all the five senses of the word.

Perceive him outside a village inn. His face turned northward, he watches a cloud of dust deposit itself again upon a quieting road. Hrush-h-h!—a dying noise, the sound of swift wheels dulling off into distance. "Good riddance!" he says, as he turns. He turns his face towards the village. At that hour the village is a fresh and morning place, all bright and lively. Sluiced water splashing over blue cobblestones, runnels singing, cockerels shouting, hens clacking and chuckling, men whistling, women chattering, children jumping; this August morning the village has awaked in good spirits and good time. The fragrance of roasting coffee-beans diffuses in the air; light sparkles on the wet red roofs and in between the violet shadows; freshness and gaiety, summer earliness, day's childhood gleam over all.

Lightly Dick Stewart turns, lightly he picks up his pack and his stick, and "Here beginneth again!" he lightly says to himself, as he steps out upon a strange and adventurous road. He is going to walk into the unknown.

Last night he came motoring to the village, but this morning the automobile has been sent away north, to Limoges, to wait there till he telegraphs for it; we saw him stand at the inn-door to watch it start away. Blart-blarting its harsh farewell it has vanished, beyond shifting clouds of dust, carrying off guide-books and goggles, wraps and road-maps, bag and baggage, and all the luxurious impedimenta of his journeying so far.

For he is to walk the rest of his wandering way. He is to make a fresh start. He is discarding system and wooing the accidental. He will foot it and chance it, he will let Luck have her errant and arrant way with him now, and with his quest. He will draw a bow at a venture. Why not? "One never knows," he reflects. "I'll give Luck a fair lead. It's always the ridiculous little causes which bring the splendid events. Dare say Luck's waiting for me somewhere—longing and languishing and expiring for me somewhere, the flirt and vixen! I'll chance it—ought to have chanced it earlier. One never knows!"

Now this was nothing strange in Dick Stewart, for a careless and dashing chessplayer with life he had usually been. "I was never a smug, systematic fellow till lately," he had reminded himself last night, at the inn. Light-heartedly he had played a random game with life until a few weeks before then; an audacious game, also, at any opportunity for dash and gay courage; but of late he had been systematic and cautious for a while. And now, after five or six weeks of this losing, new-fangled play of his, it seemed time to change his game. "Better be myself again," he thought. He had come to France in search of delectable treasure; for weeks he had searched systematically, cautiously, and unsuccessfully. So now, "Hang system!" he cries. "Smash into smallest smithereens all systems of systems!" What have his studied gambits availed him so far? He will try a new opening, he will give Destiny a random lead.

No doubt there is superstition in this. He remembers a maxim of Rory's—of his friend Rory—Rory Loxton-Phipps, M.D., of Mortimer Street, W., to wit. "Turn your back on a coveted thing and it will come after you,

fawning," was what Rory used to say. *Eh bien!* Though Dick Stewart cannot exactly turn his back on the object of his search—"Don't know the point of the compass, point of fact!" he reminds himself—he can turn his back on his method of search for it so far. His method so far has been to search according to rule and rote, by map and system. Well, he is abandoning that now; he turns his back on rule and system; henceforward at haphazard he will go.

To France he had come in quest of a hidden and mysterious and elusive place, with delectable treasure in it. There are scores of places of the kind in France—heaps of them, piles of them, holocausts of them burned and ruined, he knew; though only one of them held his treasure. Yet these places were not so many that they could not each be visited in turn, he had told himself, on a day in Lincoln's Inn Fields five or six weeks ago, when he was thinking the enterprise out and planning a careful game.

He had felt so sure of winning, then. With time and a map, with patience and scientific chessplay, he would surely find the clue and follow up the trail! Odiously certain he had been about it, then. "Francis Benedick Stewart my life long friend," he had said to himself that day in Lincoln's Inn Fields, "why should you hesitate? Bosh! You know you are only pretending to hesitate—you know you quite mean it, in the end! You have too much leisure and quite enough cash—you are no good here—go yonder! Go to France. France is a land of pleasant scamps and scampers. In France there's an occupation beckoning you, my dear fellow! An adventure—an *adventure!* With just the chance of a ravishing reward. No twopenny ha'penny adventure either, mind you, but a downright rich lottery chance. You can do it—you know you long to do it—lord, man, don't hesitate! Let yourself go!"

And that was what he had done—in a way. In a way he had let himself go. But *how* had he let himself go? "Imbecile!" he now growls at himself, as he remembers. He had crossed the Channel and become absurdly energetic by deputy—he had let a leathery ogre of a mechanic rush

him about France in a machine! And with what motive? For such a method of search and motion the motive might fairly be a whim of idlesse, a pricking curiosity, or the desire to plumb a mystery. But it is something higher than that. Romantic sympathy? Something dearer than that. He listens—he seems to hear again a voice—a wheezy but pompous voice that says, “We are going abroad—we are departing to—ah—abroad!” And I see his look grow grave and ennobled as he thinks of the real motive for his quest.

And then he frowns—frowns at his foolishness and defeat. For now, after five or six weeks of searching, he has come to the Limousin highlands a rotten failure, as he calls it—at any rate, a failure still.

Eh bien! So much for forethought and logical system! He will go back to his old style again. *Eh bien!* So much or intelligent anticipation! He will be himself, illogical and inconsequent, he will throw the bridle on the neck of Instinct, and let something wiser than Reason select his path. “Heavens above!” he is thinking, as impetuously he strides through the village, “what is their precious logic of the schools, after all? Logicians take a couple of premisses, draw a conclusion, and call the ridiculous thing a syllogism! As if circumstances and quandaries weren’t infinitely varying and numberless—as if the premisses for any accurate deduction must not be two alone, but twenty, two hundred, two thousand, two myriad! And how can finite Reason perceive, arrange, and assess them all? Not by a long chalk it can’t, of course! Finite reason, drawing sharp-cut conclusions from a few vague premisses . . . ah, the fools!” Yes, logic was pompous and elaborate folly when put into practice. Bodinton, his school chum Bodinton, had convinced him of that, by-the-by.

For what had Bodinton done, in Paris the other day? Bodinton had talked European politics for half an hour, logically basing the new on the old, and the anticipated on the known. Bodinton had taken the European map and chronicle since Trafalgar, and Bodinton had shown how again and again by all the rules of logic British policy and British arms had stood to fail. Yet again and again British

policy and British arms had triumphed, instead of failing; they had nearly always triumphed in the end. Therefore Bodinton's premisses had been insufficient, and therefore false.

"Which is a syllogism itself, by-the-by!" Dick Stewart exclaims, with his hearty generous laugh. So difficult is it, not to be logistic. "It was always your amazing English luck, mon cher!" Bodinton had said, his shoulders up to his ears. Luck and logic *must* be antagonistic, of course. The world-famous British luck is another name for British illogic. British statesmen and captains had acted, not argued; they had been guided by the immediate and pressing circumstances, not by fine-drawn plans; they had done what seemed on the whole at the time to be the best for their purpose, not what appeared the most logical or consistent. And so we had gloriously triumphed, when every logician in Europe looked to see us fail.

And if—to drop to small and personal matters—if British policy and action had so often gone at hap and hazard towards shining triumph, why should not he?

His play had been logical so far, and the consistent thing to do would be to continue his game, not change it—to keep to his swift machine and journey from possible place to place till each had been visited in turn. But he had tired of all; too much fag, too disappointing, so tediously futile. "No!" he had suddenly concluded last night, "*that's* no go!" He would give dull system the go-by, and throw himself into the arms of merry chance.

And this is why he had discarded the precise mechanic vehicle which had carried him along till then; it would be absurd to go at hap and hazard in an automobile. A bicycle would be only a degree more stable; so would a gig. Two wheels or four, one could dare through forests and hedges on wheels, or take "the footpath way." More of luck and *laissez-aller* about a nag, perhaps; and "Indeed," resentful Reason had said to him, "you ought to go a-horseback, young Quixote; as did the great Don of you all!" But Reason had always disliked his going on the quest, from the first.

Spur and bridle, champ of bit, creak of saddle, and ring of shoe would seem to promise Romance and happy adventure, but he had never been much of a horsey man. He remembered a Baboo's essay on The Horse—"The horse is a noble animal, but when irritated he will not do so"—and he felt himself quite capable of irritating even the staidest steed.

No, the refrain which the swishing tyres hinted to his ears yesterday afternoon suggested the best method of going.

"I will bundle my wallets and walk, walk !
I will bundle my wallets and walk."

"Walk it, foot it, tramp it, chance it, let system go hang and you go as you please !" That was what the rhythm of the 24-h.p. double-cylinder car had murmured to him all yesterday (though he had not understood it till after dinner)—yesterday afternoon, as the car rushed up and tobogganed down the Limousin highlands. And all this is why Dick Stewart came to be saying, "Here beginneth again !" that morning, as he swung his stick and went off along his unknown road.

I see him glance at his left elbow, as if he felt something tugging him back. The something is Habit, of course. Habit sticks to him ; though it is only five weeks old. Habit holds on to him, and "Hang habits !" he growls. "Habit's a kind of epidermis. Naturally one doesn't jump out of one's skin all at once."

The anti-walking habit which motor-cars form ; it is telling him that he will soon be dog-tired. Formal and fashionable habit, the male Mrs. Grundy, of Bond Street ; it warns him that dust and rents would soon make him look like a tramp. "Hang habit !" He torments his moustache. He has read in Pater that to form habits means failure in life. A man ought to be flexible and adaptive. "Any kind of binding habit is bad—even the good ones. Happily, nothing's so hard to form as a good habit, and nothing's so easy to leave off !"

Away with habits and habitudes ! He will really let himself go ! The road and the footpath shall allure and

conduct him—whither, he will not inquire. He will adventure towards the eternal May-be, the ever-expectant “Who knows?” He will stray delightfully, and “comprehend all vagrom men.” He will wander into undiscovered places and quaint obscure retreats. He will meet the absolutely unexpected, and acquaint himself with the wildly strange. He will learn what lies beyond the hills, and whither the byeways meander. He will travel toward the fascination of large horizons, he will trek into the unknown. He will walk and talk with the most casual and disreputable of wayfarers, he will question all and any of them, right and left. And coming finely hungry and pleasantly weary into some old little town at sunfall, he will eat and lie at a cosy inn, and be simple and careless and content. Hurrah!

Habit retires, and he goes forward, brisk and free. Impetuously, in a spurt, the village far behind, he goes, head down, and presently almost literally and actually runs up against his first tangible difficulty, which is a signpost. For the highway forks just there, a signpost stands between the prongs of the fork at their roots, and on it a magpie sits, perched; a single magpie, mateless, and therefore a bird of ill-omen.

He glowers down at Dick Stewart, Dick Stewart stares up at him.

“Scoot, you corbie crow, you ungainly fowl!”

The stick is lifted, and with a flirt of the tail the bird is off and away in looping flight. And then the man examines the arms of the post.

South-east and sou'-west the woouen-headed monitor points, with mute and scanty lore. “To Listrac—To Provenchel.” To Listrac or to Provenchel shall a waiter on chance and fortune go?

Or to neither? For Dick Stewart suddenly stands back a yard and frowns. He frowns at the post. Then he whistles. Whew-w-w! He whistles a descending chromatic scale. For the stolid monitor displays a warning. In the painted skin of the post at the level of the eye some cynical or jesting hand had scratched two words of warning: “*Va pas.*”

"*Va pas !*" says the post, in its wooden and imperturbable way. "I give you a hint. Take it or leave it—doesn't matter to me—I'm not going anywhere—I stay here."

Va pas ! Dick Stewart stares at the scratched, irregular letters of the warning. A witless kind of warning he thinks it—so general, so wide.

"And *va pas* means, I suppose"—he pulls at his moustache—"turn round—go back—don't go on !"

II

"*Va pas*, indeed! What perfectly rotten nonsense!" Dick Stewart glowers at the words. "*Va pas!* Sheer down simple elementary rot! Now I wonder what silly Johnny of an ass did that?"

But all the same he felt it as a warning. It had pulled him up with a jerk, with what sailors call "a round turn." Mystery again. For the last six weeks he had been continually plagued with mystery. Even Bodinton had been mysterious about his quest. And now——

"Can't be meant for me, anyhow," he muttered. "Nobody knew I was coming this way—didn't know I was myself, two days ago. Some farceur's joke, *coram populo*. Besides"—he was examining the letters closely—"the thing has been done for weeks—days, anyhow. The idiot scratched his *va pas* in the paint and rubbed mud into the scratches. And the mud is quite dry—it's dusting off!"

"The stupidest kind of joke, perfectly asinine!" he thought it, "but enough to make some fellows funk going on." And just such a warning is written on every signpost, at every turn in life, he reflected. *Va pas* is a bogey at every corner; "Beware, avoid, retreat; at any rate, stand still—keep where you are, risk nothing! That is the counsel, which the timid take and the plucky contemn. Bah!" he said to the signpost. "Bah!" to the old bachelor magpie, too. He struck the post with his stick, to knock away the rest of the dried mud and make the words less legible. Somebody else would be coming along, whom the ridiculous warning might scare.

Then he hitched the pack higher up between his shoulders.

"Which way?" he said to himself, with decision and

yet in doubt. "To Listrac or to Provenchel? To right or left?"

"Take the right—the left is always sinister, you know," the science of words suggested. Impatient with that, he jerked his head, and saw the shadow of it move on the white dust at his feet. The shadow-head jerked leftward, towards Provenchel. "Sinister be hanged! *That* is my route," he decided; and leftward he strode away.

The magpie flew across his path again, but the next minute he flushed up another. "Luck in a pair," he thought. "I'm right enough this time!" And thenceforward nothing warned him; no new hint of terrible happenings, of pain and care and danger to come, perplexed his mind. Even habit had ceased to argue with him. Habit had given up the game, habit had fallen back completely. Something light and joyous seemed to be carrying him along, now that he had met and braved the warning. "I believe I've blundered into the swim!" he thought.

Lightly went his feet, and he did not tire. He felt braced and taut for adventure, even the heat did not bother him. In fact, the hot, dry light of the forenoon invigorated; it was a sun-bath, burning London fog and rain deposits out. "Hurrah, I'm abroad!" he thought, remembering the sound of a wheezy but pompons voice, which had said, "We are going abroad—we are departing to—ah—abroad." He was well on the way to hear that voice again, he believed. With new and confident impulse he went along, with brightness of mind and zest of body, with buoyant poise and swing of limb. Hurrah for the road! "Simply topping, this!" he rejoiced. "*Va pas?* What rotten nonsense! Hurrah!"

Brightly and lightly he swung along; the oilskin pack hung a featherweight; the stick was needless; his lungs swelled out with deep breath and pure air. He felt himself wonderfully alert and happy, and suffused with a joy that had some less apparent cause. Hurrah for the road, the road to Provenchel! The good road, that went its honest way between strips of vineyard and spreads of crimson-

tipped emerald. He whistled as he went. He whistled original airs of his own, not particularly melodious in quality, but in quantity enough for a couple of operas. He walked and rejoiced. "I'm a free man again!" he rejoiced. "I'm Nature's man for a spell. Town? I condemn the vile town—I bite my thumb at civilization! Civilization! Streets and gas-stoves; give me the open fire and the open road. I've got them,—I've got the key of the road, the latchkey of Nature's lodging." He breathed with large respiration, and the world seemed noble and new. "Thank you, old fellow!" he cried to a crowing cock, that cheered him on from a wayside cottage wall. "Do it again, old chap; you express me exactly. I'm an ass not to have gone in for this before!"

Walk? He felt he could walk for ever, striding on and on through the rest of his golden youth. Even on this dry white road, under that blazing white sun, his legs seemed to swing along of themselves, unwearied; he hardly believed he could stop them, if he should try. Walk well? Of course he could walk well! The very road seemed to help him on, resilient. Of course he could walk well, when he tried! Had there ever been anything he could not do well, when he really tried?

Under his indifference and insouciance had always lain the steady calm egotism of the strong. It was true and decent egotism, not conceit; conceit is the egotism of the weak. He had always known for certain that his native powers would serve him well in anything at which he really tried. His legs—in this instance the native powers were his legs—his legs might be thinnish, a bit spindly, and so on; he had never particularly admired the cut of his legs; he was glad that knee-breeches and shown hose were a dead fashion, but—his legs were strong enough and swift enough; they were serving; they would excellently serve. He smiled at the thought of weak-kneed folk, and folks who fell lame. He meant his legs to carry him to Château X, and they would do it, not a doubt! *Va pas?* The road heard a hearty, contemptuous laugh. "*Va pas, forsooth!*"

He was out and agog for Château X, mysterious

Château X—Château Royal, a certain unknown and unplaced Château Royal; that should properly resemble the Keep of Camelot, with lilies and sapphires therein. Château X he would track, Château X he would espy, Château Royal with its lilies and sapphires he would reach in the end, he felt sure; though beyond what forest it lay perdu, by what great lonely avenue approached, shut in what guarded park and mirrored in what lake it rose, he could not tell. He could not even guess.

Why should he, indeed? Skilfully to guess, and rationally to know had been things of habit and system with him in the past. "You're too infernally wise for anything," Rory had said to him man a time. "But you're such a slacker. Why don't you swot—you could do anything you liked if you'd only swot!" Loyal old Rory! He had never written to Rory all these weeks of absence. It was a confounded shame, to have kept old Rory in the dark so long! "I'll write to him to-night," he resolves. "As part of my starting afresh."

Then, "Gently, gently, mon cher!" I hear him remind himself, and he checks his legs a little. No, he need not hurry—he must not hurry, he will reach Château X all the later for undue haste. He must take things easily; he must give luck and circumstance full time and chance to work their will. "Steady now," he says to his legs. "Go slow, old native powers!"

So he hummed, swung his stick, whistled an original melody in G, beat time, stepped in time to it, and went forward liltingly but lazily. Lazily, to be in tune with his surroundings; the poplars that very lazily swung through only half of their accustomed arcs, and the clouds that lazily drifted along the sky. It was good to go lazily, for life that morning was a delight. Shimmering tree-shadows, blue from the high light, zebra-striped the highway: the long, thin avenue of it opened, shortened, climbed, descended, then lengthened again; and ever his splendid path into the unknown stretched its knowing white finger ahead. By the sides of the road grey aspens and osiers showed him their silvery edges; here and there a brook reflected the sky under a lichen bridge; field scents

enraptured him, bird-titters took his ear, farmsteads winked with all their panes at him, friendly dogs came rushing out to salute him and cheer him on—ah, this was better, tons better, than a mad rush *en automobile*, blart-blarting through perpetual agitation—like a stormy petrol, he thought, and groaned at the pun.

He kept to the road itself, though many a delightful byway waited for him and lured him aside. He came to sudden corners whence the most inviting-looking lanes went gaily off, like truants joyously trooping away from duty; dusky lanes, bright lanes, russet lanes, green tunnels of lanes which seemed to lead into verdant mysteries, jolly lanes which seemed to stagger aside with merry drunken waverings, hollow lanes that dipped into dark coolness, under high red banks and holly hedges looped with briony and traveller's joy; and lanes like windowed corridors, where in between a palisade of poplar-trunks fell stripes of splendid light to chequer the red-brown shade.

He came to corners where ancient lime-kilns upstood under walnut trees, like tall old peasants gazing back upon the years and miles they had compassed, with dull old eyes under shocks of red bracken and faggots that kept the rain from their pates. He came to corners where antique walls enshrined and protected piscina-like openings, that were hung inside with cool wet tapestry of dripping moss and luxuriant hart's-tongue, and held, in green gloom like pitcher-plants, sweet store of water that had trickled in from tiny springs, for him, for his thirst, for his sluiced face, for his dipping hands.

And from each corner a lane went wandering off, going somewhere or other into space, towards ramshackle farmsteads or decrepit cottages, where uncivilized dogs used bad language at any passer-by; going towards houses of the past very often, deserted houses that still stood, or had been partly pulled down, or had been burned down, or by weight of years had broken down, long ago; the wild fig fell over their nakedness and age. And everywhere silence—silence, as in an unpeopled land. Sometimes the shrill creak of cartwheels down a rutty lane was audible, sometimes

on an arable hill the distant silhouettes of peasants and oxen could be seen against the sky ; but those were the only signs of human life. For Stewart was deep in the rural Limousin now, where Time lags slow, and where France seems what it was in Royal days.

He did not wander aside, into any delightful bypath or natural pleasaunces ; to quit the highroad would have seemed cowardice, he thought. "*Va pas ?* I'll go on all the more ! I'll keep on, straight on, no matter what I come to !" Still resenting the warning of the signpost, he went on as straight as he could. That was not very straight, it is true ; indeed, it was hardly straight at all, for endless were the vagaries, and absurd the twists and angles, of that ancient *route du Roi*. The earliest Gauls must have trodden it first, and in spite of French macadamizers it remained inconceivably primitive and old.

But its windings shortened the apparent distance, by keeping the journey full of variety and unexpected charm ; they cheered the heart of the wayfarer without too much wearying his feet ; they prepared surprises for him ; they seemed to connect and perpetuate the footprints of somebody older than the oldest Gauls—of some merry Titan who had traped about the quag there, when it had newly emerged from the Flood. For miles the way went in hollow places, under the shoulders of hillocks and copses ; but presently it lifted the wayfarer up to a high bare place, where the path crossed a kind of common or heath, and a shallow quarry of road-mending stone lay exposed. Perceive the place : a stony place, that dazzles with pale glitter ; perceive the cracked and chipped fragments white with mica glinting in the sun, the yellow agrimony spiking up, the purple loosestrife, the blue of bramble-berries showing amidst very green leaves, the red-spotted vipers sunning themselves at the edge of the glaring white way.

The quarriers and stone-breakers had quitted the place for a time, but they had left behind them some orderly rhomboidal heaps of broken stone, and a straw-thatched screen that had served as a shelter from too much sunlight or rain. And it was here that Dick Stewart came upon the Boy.

Under the shadow of the screen the Boy was sitting on the quarry ; he was a boy quite capable of sitting upon anything, in point of fact. He really was lying more than sitting, however : his legs and feet were comfortably cocked up on a heap of stone, with the toes of his boots turned out aggressively higher up than his head. A lazy boy he was, apparently, and yet a very sharp-looking, audacious urchin of a boy, with a freckled face dust-powdered, and a pointed nose under a torn straw hat.

He was lying there alone, in a sort of woodland wilderness, and yet he did not seem a rustic boy at all. He looked like a towny boy—a Parisian boy,—with a good deal of the gamin of Belleville about his appearance and manner. He could hardly be an industrious boy, not a boy to enjoy even a larky kind of labour, for not an ounce of stone did he appear to have broken, though the most knowing and cunning and tempting of hammers, with a shining head and a handle of twisted withy, lay close in reach. He kept his hands in his pockets ; and he was not a well-mannered boy at all, for he did not rise, or withdraw his hands even, or utter the merest “*Bonjour, M’sieur !*” at the sight of Stewart. He was, indeed, a perky, saucy boy, short for his apparent years, but lamentably precocious. And though he lay there all alone and miles from anywhere, he did not seem the least bit lonesome or afraid.

Stewart came plodding up, and how did this boy salute him ?

“*Hello, my zebra ! you been a long time, haven’t you ?*” the boy said, sticking his toes up higher. “*Why didn’t you come afore ? . . . Got a match ?*”

“*Good heavens above !*” Dick Stewart paused, and stood looking down at the urchin with eyes of gravity. With a pair of keen little eyes the boy looked up at him. Stewart could see the keen little eyes through the hole between the crown of the ragged straw hat and the torn-away brim, which looped down upon the freckled nose.

“*Speak, my old zebra !*” said the boy. “*Talk ! Didn’t you hear me ask if you’d got a match ?*”

III

"I DID, young Impudence!" said Stewart. "I heard you plainly."

"So you ain't deaf?" said the boy. "Nor dumb, it appears. Very well, then, come on! Gimme a match!"

Dick Stewart regarded him in sorrowful silence.

"Got one, h'ain't you?"

"Yes," Dick Stewart said. "I have; several. Boxful, point of fact."

"Very well, then, give us a few; one, anyhow. Quick!"

"Want to set the place afire, do you, you young ruffian?"

"Garn!" said the gamin; or rather he said the Parisian equivalent for that expressive word. "Set the place afire!" Contemptuously he repeated that phrase. He raised his right eyebrow, shut his left eye, and slowly opened it, with a most knowing and impudent wink. He was pulling out a pipe—and a corncob pipe too, that instrument for the tobacco connoisseur. "I been wanting a smoke for hours! Only I'm run out o' 'bacca."

"Are you?" Dick Stewart remarked. "I'm glad. . . . Then you won't want a match."

"My aunt!" the boy exclaimed in surprise; "ain't as mean as all that, are you? You got some 'bacca, hain't you, eh?"

"Yes, I have, you young shaver. But I got it for myself."

In a land where tobacco is dear the boy could understand a reply like that, and did not consider it particularly stingy.

"Gimme a match, anyhow," he said. Then he stared very hard, and exclaimed, "I say, you know, you're Faldal-do!"

"Am I?" said Dick. "Wasn't aware of it, my boy."

"Only Faldalaldo's Italian, and you're English, aren't you? . . . Garn, I don't want none of your nasty English 'bacca. I got some first-class coltsfoot, if I'd got a match."

"Coltsfoot?" Dick Stewart inquired. "New brand, that. What do you mean by coltsfoot?"

"Mean coltsfoot," said the boy. "Never heard of coltsfoot, didn't you? Garn! it's better nor English 'bacca, any day."

"Coltsfoot, eh? How do you get it?" Stewart inquired.

"Garn! You just gets it—it's leaves; you gets it off the ground, that's how. . . . Lots about, there is!" The boy was stuffing fragments of dry, grey leaf into the corncob bowl. "If you're an Englishman," he said, looking up keenly, "where's your teeth?"

"In my mouth, of course," said Dick Stewart. "Can't you see them?"

"Garn! I mean your big teeth," said the boy. "English always have big teeth, like wolves. I've seen 'em in pictures."

"Oh, my *big* teeth!" Dick Stewart said. "I leave my big teeth in England. It isn't quite good manners to bring them abroad."

"Garn!" said the boy again. "Gimme a match."

"My impudent young friend, I have done so. I am your match. I refuse to give you any other kind of match. Do you think I will encourage you in the filthy and pernicious habit of smoking? No, not by a long chalk! All habits are bad, but . . . What's your name, by-the-by? And how old are you?"

"Coco. Twelve," the boy sulkily said.

"And not near four foot high, I imagine. Though I can't tell for certain, while you sprawl there like that, you lazy young dog! Why don't you walk and be energetic, like I am? Coco, you are stunting your growth; if you smoke you'll never be a six-footer, Coco! My erring kid, you must either stint or stunt. Drop that pipe this minute! I'm surprised your people let you! What can your mother be thinking of!"

"Don't know," the boy said shortly. "Nothing. She's dead."

Dick Stewart looked discomfited for a minute. Then he said, "I'm not surprised to hear it—you're enough to be the death of anybody, you—young matricide! Where's your father, by-the-by?"

The boy jerked his head towards the forest.

"Over there, is he? What's he doing there?"

"Nothing," said the boy. "He's giving me fun."

"A pretty kind of father you've got, I fear, my poor Coco," Dick Stewart said, striking a match for his own pipe with superb inconsistency. "Giving you fun, is he? Much better give you the stick."

"Don't you say nothing against my father, Faldalaldo!" the boy cried angrily. "He'll make it jolly hot for you if you do! You wouldn't if you knew who he is! Why," he went on with pride, "he's an *agent*, my father is!"

"Is he really? And what is he agent for?"

"Garn!" said the boy with contempt, as if that were a totally superfluous question. "My father is. . . ." admiration for his father gave him breathless pause. "My father's the cleverest and famousest man as ever was. My father would lick you out and out at anything! My father can dress up and act awful, better nor any theatre! My father can dress up and act so as he makes *me* believe he's somebody else . . . My aunt! sometimes I don't know he's my father at all!"

"Exactly," Dick Stewart said. "It's a wise child that knows his own father. What about your aunt?"

"Garn!" said the boy. "When I says, 'My aunt!' I don't mean my aunt. Haven't got one!"

"Nor I," said Dick Stewart. "We're a kind of double orphan, Coco,—auntless. But go on—fire away!"

"My father tells me things," the boy said proudly. "Sometimes he tells me *secrets*."

"Does he really," said Dick Stewart, looking at his pipe, which had gone out again while he talked to this uncommon kind of boy.

"Yes, *awful* secrets!" the boy said triumphantly.

"Then you can tell me one, perhaps. You live somewhere here, don't you?"

The boy regarded him disdainfully. "Garn! I'm having my holidays here."

"Exactly." Dick Stewart struck a match. "But even in holidays"—he paused to puff at the light—"even on a holiday one has to live somewhere."

"Why, of course," the boy said rapturously. "We're living in a van. A *gipsy* van, it's splendid! And *such* a stove in it. Only it's the wrong weather for stoves. . . . Ah-h!" He had pounced on the still-burning match which Stewart had dropped incautiously, and "Hi-tiddly-hi-ti!" he cried in triumph. "Garn!"

"You've beaten me, have you, you amazing imp!" Dick Stewart said slowly. "Why don't you smoke cigarettes, if you must smoke at all?"

"Garn!" the boy said contemptuously. "Cigarettes! I'm not a baby. Hi-tiddly-hi-ti, I'm *un*, *un* lit!" He rejoiced and vaunted! Then he began to sing,—

"En montant sur la tour Eiffel,
Avec mon cousin Gabriel."

"Why," he went on proudly, "sometimes I've smoked cane."

"Cane, have you? It ought to be applied to the other end of you, Coco."

"Cane's awful dangerous, you know," the boy said, under the influence of his pipe becoming more friendly. "Anybody might get the yellow janders with cane."

"So they might," Dick Stewart said. "And yellow janders are the awfulest kind, aren't they, by-the-by? Green janders are bad enough, and red janders are worse, but the yellow variety——"

"Cut it!" said the boy, "I'm not having any, Falda-laldo. Why don't you sit down and smoke, sociable?" He was smoking furiously himself.

"Most remarkable Coco, I yield. You conquer me, Coco." Dick Stewart sat down on the heap of stone and watched the urchin suck at his coltsfoot with a dreadful joy. "Now, then, you must tell me,—there's a place I

want to find, Coco. Perhaps you may have been there."

"I know. You're meaning Provenchel," the youngster said. "That's where I saw you before, Faldalaldo. . . . Square round a bit, you're sitting on my leg. . . . You was in a show there." He puffed smoke through his nose in quite a masterly and ostentatious way. "Can you do that, Faldalaldo?"

"I can't," said Dick Stewart. "I didn't begin young enough. But what about the show?"

"A puppet show it was," said the boy.

"Fine!" said Dick Stewart. "I'm fond of puppet-shows myself."

"And you needn't pay anything, unless you like to," said the boy.

"Exactly." Dick Stewart, in the course of his five weeks of wandering in France, had seen such puppet-shows in the open, and could understand. The travelling-stage, under the trees and the stars, in the Square; the hissing naphtha-flame, yellow against the dark blue; the flickering shadows crawling up and then withdrawing; the ring of intent-faced children squatting, the rows of grown-ups standing around outside.

"Acted pretty near as clever as my father can, they did," said the boy. "And only little dolls, you know. My aunt! it's wonderful how they can do it. There was a little zebra just like you—same colour hair. Singer Faldalaldo, he said he was, a tenor."

"A tenor, and just like me? What do you mean by a tenor?"

"Garn! you knows what a tenor is, don't you? Chap as sings high up in his head. I believe he *was* you, too. You'd gone to the seaside and lost all your money, you had, so you thought you'd give some concerts in the house, to get some more. 'Hi-tiddly-hi-ti,' was what you sings, and a Madame come in, as was mad about music, and when you sings 'Loup, laup, loop, loh!' just like that, she puts her arms tight like this"—Coco crossed his arms on his breast—"and says, 'Oh-but-isn't-it-beautiful, oh-but-isn't-it-beautiful,' lots of times, and then she gives you gold

money. You was a little doll with a whopping big moustache, and the Madame she says, 'Sing again, Singer Faldalaldo,' and then you sings, 'Loh, loup, laup, loup!'—downhill that time—and she puts her arms like this and says, "Oh-but-*isn't-it-beautiful*, oh-but-*isn't-it-beautiful*,"—any amount of times—twenty. Made me laugh."

"I should think it did, indeed," said Stewart. "Well, and what did I do next? I don't remember."

"Well, and then an old chap comes in with his hair all over his head and says, 'Hi-tiddly, my wife's mother's very ill upstairs, and your singing'll kill her. I should die myself if *she* died,' he says; 'How much'll you take not to sing any more?' And then you tells him twenty louis, and he pays it you and goes away joyful. . . . Oh, I'm having fun this holiday, I am!"

"I should think you are. But what then? That wasn't all?"

"Should think it wasn't, neither. 'Cause the Madame, she comes again, and says, 'Sing to me, sing to me, sweet, oh, dear Faldalaldo, and I'll kiss you.' And you says, 'Gimme twenty louis instead,' and she gives you 'em. And you're going on singing, lots, and the old chap with hair all over his head comes in in a wax, and says, 'She's dead! My wife's mother's dead! I can't live without her.' And he's got a big sword as he kills himself with, straight off."

"Unhappy man!" said Dick Stewart. "And what next?"

"In comes the agent,—not the great Joseph Leroux, y' know, but a gendarme. And then there's the Judge and the trial, and the guillotine for you, 'cause you sung 'em dead, and . . . oh, it was fust-class!" the boy cried in rapture. "My aunt!"

"Exactly!" But somehow Dick Stewart felt shivery; as he had felt at the signpost; as he had felt at Saumur. But "Now perhaps you can listen to me a little," he said. "I can't give you twenty louis, but I've got a franc for you if you earn it."

"Hi-tiddly-hi-ti!" cried the boy, "hand it over!"

"Wait. You must earn it, Coco. There's a place somewhere here I very much want to go to. If you travel

about in a van perhaps you have come across it. A place called Château Royal, I mean—do you know the way to Château Royal?"

"Château Roy——! . . . My aunt!" The boy swung his legs off the stone heap and sat up. "Château *Royal*!" The boy stood up and stared. Then he began to edge away from Stewart, as if in fear. "Yes, he did—he *did* say it!" he exclaimed to himself . . . "He *did* say Château Roy— . . . Dad! *Dad!*" The boy had begun to run.

"Here, you touch-and-go young rascal, come back with you, come back! You know something—come back!"

But the boy was scurrying across the quarry, stumbling into its shallow hollows and leaping out of them, hotly and excitedly making for the copse beyond, and "Dad! *Dad!*" he was shouting as he ran.

"Come back, you imp!" But, for all answer, the lad, pausing a moment to do it, put his thumb to the end of his nose, extended his fingers with the pipe in them, and made that inelegant and insulting gesture which in French is called a *piéd-de-nez*. Then he vanished into brushwood and trees.

"The brat! The tantalizing brat!" Dick Stewart picked up his stick and resumed the road again. "Knows a thing or two, that boy! Knows something about Château Royal! I ought to have held him, of course. Confound my slowness!"

"Very remarkable affair though! And his father an agent. Agent of police, of course—he mentioned Joseph Leroux . . . *By Jove!*"

Dick Stewart stopped short and stood motionless in the middle of the road. Then he began to whistle. He whistled the four notes of the common chord, slowly, prolonging the upper C, and looking out over his protruded lips with meditative eyes. He was reflecting that no sooner had he come upon something like a trace of Château Royal than he had found a hint of connection between Château Royal and the police. . . . A mighty unpleasant suggestion, that; and the worst of it was that it confirmed, no matter how vaguely, a vague presentiment

which he had felt at Saumur. About a picture that had been stolen from Saumur. . . .

Heavily he plodded on. He tried to forget that suggestion, he tried to forget about the boy, as he went along under ripening chestnuts that overhung the winding white way. But he could not forget, and now, to add to his depression, he began to feel hungry. It was good to be nobly hungry, good to have earned a large-size appetite and a copious thirst, yet . . . the boy, the signpost and the police, the picture at Saumur and the boy! . . .

But now, as he rounded the hundredth bend in the road, there, pat and ready and just what he could most have wished for, an outdoor table and a shady bench, in front of a thatched and mossy little auberge, rose to view.

IV

OFF with the pack—down with it, down with hat and stick on the table under the dome of chestnut leaves—down with himself on the bench in the open, in the green shadow, in the cool! The inn looks clean, the trees about it cast shade upon the brilliant road—a dog comes wagging welcome—a round little hostess emerges, smiling and tidy—"Stunning! Perfectly topping, this!" Dick Stewart thinks, as he rests and respire, forgetting the boy and the signpost. "Bonjour, Madame!" he says joyously. "Glad to see you, Madame! I'm hungry, Madame! I could eat *you*, Madame! Something else good, as quick as you can. And meantime your coldest drink!"

"Bon!" the round little woman said, showing smiling teeth. "Bien, M'sieur! Certainly, yes!" Deftly she spread and served the table. And presently, when an omelette, a ragoût, and a salad had come and gone, when grapes and pears and walnuts had succeeded them, when coffee fumed on the table, and the woman sat near him knitting, while the grey-blue breath of a cigar went wavering up into the whispering green dome, Dick Stewart spoke again, in high content.

"Madame is a wonderful cook," he said. "For one so young and fair. Madame is very young, by-the-by?"

"Certainly not!" she said, regarding him doubtfully.

"And very charming, too!"

"Certainly not!" she said again, but she smiled.

He put four francs on the edge of the table. "Mere silver, only," he said. "Madame wears gold. On her finger. Ah, if Madame were not already married!"

"M'sieur is one of those flatterers!" she said, as she took up the money. "M'sieur is like all the Messieurs!"

Why, she was forty-one, she told him. Yes, actually!
"Bien sûr!" She knitted away.

"Impossible! What, actually? Then you must have been born very young?"

She was a baby when she was born, she assured him.

"I can't believe it, Madame! If you are forty-one now, you must have been twenty at birth," he said, inconsequently. "And you cooked where you came from, I feel sure."

"How? What does M'sieur mean?" she asked, bewildered.

"My dear Madame, you cook so celestially," he said.

"But, but——" She did not understand, she said. She cooked with charcoal, always. Anyhow, she was sure she was forty-one.

"Then Madame will be very wise?"

She hoped so, she said, lifting up her knitting to count the stitches. She tried to be wise. Bien sûr!

"Madame being wise, she will know where Château Royal is to be found?" Still jestingly, but half hopefully he said it.

"Château Royal? Tiens, tiens . . . Château Royal?" she said. "Why, yes, everybody knows that, don't they? A wonderful place too, by all accounts. Though I have never seen it, I."

"You know where it is? Do you really?" he cried, delighted.

"Certainly, M'sieur—bien sûr."

"You do? By Jove, I knew it was somewhere here—that boy as good as said so." Excitedly he leaned forward. "Where is it, Madame, where is it? Château Royal, with a picture in it—I'm hungry for it—serve it at once!" He sprang up.

Tolerantly she smiled. "M'sieur would find it heavy on the stomach," she said. "It is not here, it is far, it is near Paris. At Versailles."

Versailles? Back he dropped in disappointment, sitting silent a minute, while wrens and blackcaps chattered at him ironically from the branches overhead. Then he too smiled, a tolerant and patient smile, at his own expense.

"Madame," he said, "behold me, consider me. What does Madame think of me? I consider myself an elaborate ass! And my name is Faldalaldo."

"That would be an English name," she said, smiling. She had seen some English before. At Limoges. English were always droll. "M'sieur would be English, without doubt?"

"Think so?" he said.

"Or possibly Russian?"

"Not French, then, Madame?"

Oh no—not French! No, no, she was sure about that. Quite sure. Bien sure. Bon enfant de Marie, no Frenchman could be so droll! . . . But now that M'sieur had invited her to be curious, she was very curious indeed, she said; though she kept on knitting, with the quick, calm industry of a Frenchwoman.

"Curious about what, Madame?"

"About what M'sieur may be. M'sieur Faldal—what is it?"

"Faldalaldo."

"M'sieur Faldalaldo does not drive, M'sieur Faldalaldo does not ride a bicyclette, M'sieur does not promenade himself in a wild, mad automobile—M'sieur walks!" She looked at his dusty boots. "M'sieur walks far. Yet M'sieur is not a tramp?"

"Bien sûr," said he.

"Of course not!" she laughed. "M'sieur is not like a chemineau—even the new one, the clean one, Pied-de-nez." She laughed again, apparently at the thought of Pied-de-nez this time. And then, "Ah, there he is, par exemple!" she said, as a vague and vagrom figure came slouching down the road. "Ah, how it is wonderful! I say his name, and he comes! Bel, Bel!" She was quieting the growling dog. "No, nothing for you to-day, my poor Pied-de-nez. Allez, mon pauvre, allez-vous-en, je parle à M'sieur Faldalaldo. . . ." She turned to Stewart. "M'sieur was saying?"

"I was saying that I want Château Royal. It is somewhere near here, I feel sure."

"Château Royal? Near here? Nay, I know it not!"

She was scratching the back of her head with her knitting needles. "No, I know it not. . . . But perhaps Pied-de-nez. . . . Say, then, Pied-de-nez!" She sent her voice after the vagrant. "Know you a Château Royal about here, Pied-de-nez—a Château *Royal*? . . . Ah, he does not answer; he is offended, M'sieur, because I gave him nothing for his bag. . . . *Tiens*, he still goes!"

"Pied-de-nez you call him? Who is he, by-the-by?"

"A chemineau, M'sieur. . . . Ah, he is gone quite. . . . Only a chemineau, M'sieur. A new one, a poor mad one. Sometimes he is very droll, like M'sieur."

"Good heavens above!" Dick Stewart sat upright very suddenly. "Am I ever droll? Like *me*, do you say?"

Merrily she laughed. "I say like M'sieur, because he tramps—like M'sieur. But M'sieur is not a chemineau. Nor a pedlar; though M'sieur carries a pack. It is a little pack, however—perhaps only linen?"

"And brushes."

"Brushes, yes," she said. "M'sieur will have very fine brushes. I have seen very fine brushes at Limoges. M'sieur is well dressed. M'sieur is a gentilhomme. M'sieur is of the high gentry, one sees that plain. Is it not so?"

"Madame, I am afraid it is," Dick Stewart said, simply enough. "If several lazy generations make it so. I belong to the illustrious race of the Faldalaldoes. But I can't help that, Madame. I wanted to be born somebody else, but couldn't quite arrange it. I assure you it is more my misfortune than my fault."

"Bien sûr," she said, with a fine democratic pity.

"Several futile generations, and some very unfortunate ones," he said gravely. "And now Madame beholds the last of us, tramping like any turnpike sailor—what you call any chemineau. And Madame wonders *why* I tramp?"

Yes, indeed she did, she said, still smiling.

"Madame, the explanation is easy: it is the better to search; I am searching for treasure."

Treasure! Searching for treasure! The knitting fell to the little woman's lap, and she also dropped several stitches. Treasure! Her eyes sparkled with comprehension, for treasure-hunting is almost a mania with the Limousin folk.

"*Tiens, tiens !*" she said, "my cousin Georges, *he* found some! Seventy-three old louis—under a stump in a field of hemp! M'sieur is searching for money—gold money, very old, under the ground in a crock!"

"No, not exactly that," he said slowly. "Sapphires, Madame. A pair of large and lovely sapphires. Hidden in a Château Royal."

Tiens, tiens ! Yes, sapphires—at the Château Royal—at Versailles! Versailles was near Paris, yes. She herself had seen sapphires, though not at Versailles. Her cousin-by-marriage, Claudine, wife of Georges, *she* had sapphires. Two sapphires. Claudine bought them at Paris. You could buy anything at Paris; or at Versailles. Claudine wore hers to mass on Sundays.

"Does M'sieur think the Bon Dieu likes to see people with jewellery at church on Sundays?" the little woman went on, with a touch of jealousy of Claudine. She herself would not do it, not if she had a hundred jewels, no! Her cousin Georges was so foolish about Claudine, who was ugly, after all. Claudine's would not be the sapphires of M'sieur, of course. Sapphires were blue.

"No, Madame—violet coloured," he said solemnly enough, though he smiled as he flicked the ash from his cigar. "At least, those I search for are violet-coloured. Very gentle, beautiful sapphires, Madame. That, all the same, can flash!"

"Bien sûr," she said again. Claudine's could flash. If M'sieur's sapphires were violet-coloured, they would be American sapphires, she suggested. Or German, perhaps?

"Neither, Madame. English sapphires, maybe, but . . . no, probably French, in an English setting. . . . They went abroad, dear Madame; they departed to—ah—abroad," he added in a mimicking voice. . . . "But French, I should think; though I have seen them too seldom to be sure."

"*Tiens, tiens !* And M'sieur Faldalaldo walks to see them again!" she said large-eyed.

"M'sieur Faldalaldo would run, swim, or fly to see them again!" he said deeply. "But they have vanished, Madame; they have taken themselves away!"

"Witch sapphires they would be, then?" she said, with a shake of the head. Oh, it was well known, witch-treasure was! You saw it, you put out your hand for it, and *plan!* it was gone!

"Madame," he said gravely, "I dared not put out my hand."

"Ah, since M'sieur did not hold them tight they would vanish, of course." But happily there were such people as Wise Women, she told him, who knew where witch-treasure vanished to. "M'sieur ought to go to a Wise Woman at once!"

"I have come to one," he said; but he spoke rather inattentively, as she had just done. They both were watching a stranger approach, on foot, from the bend in the road.

"Another chemineau, eh? Not Pied-de-nez again, is it, Madame?"

No, it was not Pied-de-nez again; in fact, it was not a chemineau at all. It was somebody much stranger to see in rustic France than a Pied-de-nez, and much less in keeping with the landscape. The man approaching the inn was a big, jolly-looking, round-faced fellow of forty or so, smiling with a continual expression of good-humoured wonder and puzzlement. Slowly he came, though not wearily, and he was carrying an umbrella and a bag.

"Madame is wise—Madame shall advise me; yet first I will tell Madame what I have done," Stewart was saying. But the woman hardly listened; as, in the midst of the most eloquent speech or entrancing music, eyes will stray off to watch a late-comer enter, so Madame was staring down the road.

"*Tiens, tiens!* Another uncommon kind of M'sieur!" she said. "Ma foi, a comical one this!"

"English, for a fiver!" Stewart thought.

Lamentably dusty—splashed with dust, so to speak—dusty to the waist, every white atom showing against a navy-blue suit, the new-comer approached with a slow, flat-footed, and balancing gait, which suggested the habit of marching, and marching in file.

"What is it, then, *parbleu!* this object?" said Madame. She looked at the small leather bag which hung from the

stranger's left hand ; she considered the unfurled umbrella.

"It is one of those German', maybe?"

"No, Englishman! And if I'm not mistaken . . . Yes, by George, that will be it!" Fun flashed into Stewart's eyes; he whistled a long bar. "What can he be doing here?" Then "'Tention!" he shouted, as the man came near. "'*Tention!*" It was thundered in a drill-sergeant's harsh tone of command.

It acted like a word of magic. Down into the dust went bag and umbrella, precisely against the trouser-seams came the thumbs, smartly the heels clicked together, and there in the middle of the road the stranger stood arrested and motionless, his waist indrawn, eyes front, chin up, rigid as if on parade.

"*Tiens, tiens!*" the little woman giggled. "Bon enfant de Marie, I could laugh!"

V

THE man himself began to laugh, a jolly but silent laugh that shook him from the waist upwards—a laugh without sound, but still such a helpless and abandoning and infectious sort of laugh that Dick Stewart had to join in, and the little woman positively shrieked her part in the chorus. The man in the middle of the road was laughing himself breathless, laughing the tears into his eyes, laughing till he was almost ready to tumble, yet keeping his legs rigid in the attitude of 'tention on parade all the while. Benevolently Dick Stewart beamed at him, and enjoyingly the man beamed back; until at length he found breath to utter—

“Say the—word, sir—fetch me . . . orf p'rade!”

“Standa—tease!” Dick Stewart thundered. “Diss—miss! . . . My dear sir, I very sincerely beg your pardon, I do, indeed; but, good heavens above, man, why do you do it? If I hadn't been clear you were English, and accustomed to be drilled, I'd never have—— Habit, again, of course; habits are quite a mistake, by-the-by. If it hadn't been a habit of yours——”

“Bless your heart, sir, that's nothing!” said the jolly-looking man, in a gasp as he thumbed at his eyes. “That's nothing, that isn't; I done it orfen afore; I'm always doing it. I had a uncle as was in the Army, so it comes kind of natural, J'y'see? I done it, furinstans, middle o' Whitehall, when the guards was changing, and people laughing, and omnibuses cursing awful. Sing'ler thing how it comes the old soldier when I hears the word of command! . . . Only—— Them eggs, bedod! I'll be bail they're broke!” He lifted his bowler hat at the back and put his finger-nails into his hair; he was staring down at his bag.

"Bought that there tricky little bag in 'Olborn, I did!" he said slowly. "When I come into my bit o' money. Real leather. Respectable-looking little bag, isn't it, sir? Gentleman's sort of bag, that is. Only—it dropped, d'y'see? There was half a dozen fresh eggs in that bag. . . . I'll be bail they're gone all over my——"

He checked himself, stooped, lifted the bag, opened it, and held it up to his eyes. "Broke!" he said blankly. "Every mother's son of 'em. All over my clean collar an' flannel night——. . . Begging your pardon, mum," he went on, reddening, "I wasn't meaning to mention nothing rude." Cocking up a knee, he rested the bottom of the bag upon it, and began to fish out fragments of eggs, each of which in turn he regarded disgustedly and then dropped in the dust.

"Lookyhere, sir," he said blankly, as he pulled out a whitish and folded garment splashed with yolk. "That's it, sir—what I'm not going to mention, mum, so you needn't be afraid! A pictur, ain't it, sir? All over egg. It'll ha'to be washed, now, p'raps. . . . Think I could manage, though? Isn't so very bad, p'raps? . . ." He wiped his fingers on the breast of the nightshirt, looked at it disgustedly again, and said, "Bedod!"

Dick Stewart stifled his laughter. "My dear man," he said, "if I'd dreamed you carried eggs in your bag. . . . Why on earth do you do it, by-the-by?"

"When I has a' egg I wants it to be a' egg," said the man. "Not a chicken. There was very good eggs at the pub where I stopped last night, so I laid in a stock. For a rainy day, d'y'see? as the saying is. . . . But it don't matter a bit, there's more a-laying somewhere—hens is very industrious. Only"—he dipped into the bag again, and held up something circular and white and yellow. "There's a Sunday collar for you!" he said with disgust. "I s'pose I *may* mention a collar, sir?" he whispered, "won't hurt the good lady's feelings, collars won't? . . . Never mind, I can wear it innards out, p'raps? Eggs is wholesome. When they're good."

"I can spare yor a collar, I dare say, if it comes to that," Dick Stewart said. "But put it all down, my dear

sir. Sit down and let it pass. . . . What were you, by-the-by? Militia? Regulars? Or Volunteers?"

"Metropolitan P'leece!" said the new-comer. "Militia before that. . . . But I don't know as it's any particular business o' yours what I were, not as fur as I'm aware on?" He was regarding the nightshirt ruefully.

"It is not indeed," Dick Stewart said suavely. "So again I ask your pardon. But, my dear sir, there's absolutely nothing to be ashamed of! You ought to be proud. What if you do belong to the Police? I'm a Londoner myself, and I consider the London constables my best friends."

"Pretty well known to some on 'em, p'raps," the other said glumly.

"And quite proud to say I am. Why shouldn't I be? They honour me by their acquaintance. Robert's a rare fellow! Who sees one safe indoors, after a roaring night? The excellent constable A.I. Who tells us the way we should go, and sees that we don't depart from it? Robert, the admirably civil Robert. My dear sir, you ought to be proud of your cloth—such a good cloth, too, such an elegant blue! London would be a hole of a place without you. . . . By-the-by, I seem to know you; do I? I never saw you in Hatton Garden, did I, by any chance?"

"Hatting Garding?" the new-comer said. "Why . . . what . . . no, I don't know as you ever did."

"You are sure, quite sure? It wasn't you who told me that Mr.—Mr. Somebody was giving up?"

The new-comer regarded him with slow surprise. "Never was on that beat, sir—not as fur as I'm aware on, that is. . . . Sing'ler thing, though, you mentioning Hatting Garding. . . ."

"Doesn't matter," Dick Stewart said. "You constables look so much alike in uniform, that I thought it might have been you I saw there one day."

He paused, and in the pause his eyes seemed to dream. . . . "But it doesn't matter, as you said about the eggs. You have quite forgiven me for drilling you, I hope? Dare say you'll be thirsty, aren't you? Let me get you something."

"Don't mind if I do, sir," the other said. Then, in a puzzled way, "You was mentioning Hatting Garding, sir. It's a queer start, but——"

"Madame, my dear good Madame, another bottle, if you please. And as cool as the last," Dick Stewart was saying. "Sit down, officer; sit down—don't be so beastly proud! Really, you know, you make me uncomfortable! Standing there and watching me like that! If I wasn't the most innocent fellow alive, I . . . Excellent fellows, you police, but a bit disconcerting to have one of you come on me here, hundreds of miles from the Mansion House! Won't you sit down?"

"I'm drying the egg a bit, d'y'see, sir?" said the other in a whisper. "While the good lady isn't here, d'y'see?" He was flapping the flannel garment about like a banner.

"Quite right," said Dick Stewart. "I'd wash it first, though, if I were you. . . . There's a saying in this country," he resumed, "that if you go into a crowded room and shout, 'Fly! all is known!' seven out of ten of the crowd will run like rabbits. You're in plain clothes, but—Great Scotland Yard, man, what on earth is a Metropolitan policeman doing *here*?"

"He isn't, sir," said the other.

"Eh? Isn't? I don't understand."

"Wouldn't contradick you for worlds, sir, but it's a lie! No, sir—never no more, no thenks! Not me,—you don't catch *me* at it twice! Give up being a' instrument of injustice, *I* have! . . . My word, but it's warm!" He had taken off his hat, and was wiping the rather narrow space between his eyebrows and the roots of his hair. "Used to give me th' 'ump, sir, the Force did, if you'll believe *me*."

"Really," said Dick Stewart, "I'm afraid I don't understand."

"I've cut the Force, sir, d'y'see?"

"Have you indeed!" said Stewart with great apparent interest. "Hope you didn't hurt it, by -the-by? I shouldn't like it to be hurt."

"Why not, sir?" the ex-policeman said fiercely. "It

deserves to be hurt, the Force does—all these here inquests into the Force as they ta'ks or is wanted bad, sir, if you'll believe me! Directly I come into my bit o' money I cut the Force, that very minute, sir—it's no job for a honest man."

"Oh, come now! You don't mean to say that! I've often had the idea I'd like to join the Force myself."

"Don't you go and do it, sir—don't you go and do nothing o' the sort!" the ex-policeman said earnestly.

"You'll rue the day you does! The Force, bedod!" He said it with an amazed contempt. "To blazes with the Force! Why, what is it, sir? A instrument o' the Lor, sir—that's what the Force is! No thanks, not *me*! . . . Believe it's pretty well dry now," he went on, inspecting the garment. "Don't suppose it'll want washing now, sir; what d'y'think?"

"Not absolutely, I dare say." Dick Stewart smiled. . . . "But you were mentioning the Lor, my dear sir. I don't exactly understand. What is the Lor?"

"A swindle, sir—a s'windle, that's what the Lor is!" The man was speaking with a strange earnestness. "It don't give fair measure, the Lor don't; it don't balance. The Lor isn't moral, sir. Give me ekity, not Lor, if you wants to please *me*!"

"Give you what?"

"Ekity," said the ex-policeman.

"I would with pleasure, my dear man, if I'd got it. I'd give you almost anything; I'm so sorry about those eggs. What do you say it is, though? I don't quite understand."

"Ekity," said the other. "*Ekity!* Mean to say you never heard of ekity? Ekity's what's fair, d'y'see, not what's Lor. I'm over here on ekity business now." Then, as the little woman arrived with glasses and a bottle, "Mercy boko, Madame!" this astonishing ex-policeman said.

"Wonderful! Madame, did you hear? He speaks French, Madame!" Dick Stewart's eyebrows had gone up. "My dear sir, do you know, you are a very remarkable man. Quite a loss to the Force, I'm sure. Really, you are

too unique for anything. You talk about equity, and speak French."

"Not me," said the ex-constable, modestly. "Only speaks it a bit. Been living at Boulogne, d'y'see. I'm pretty good at picking things up though—always was. Good health, sir." He lifted his glass. "They *do* say French is hard—harder than the Greece language—I *should* say the Greek; but I don't find it that way myself. There's dodges, d'y'see. Furinstans, French is a fool of a language about the he's and she's; nobody never knows whether a French thing's a he or a she; p'raps you've noticed it? If it's a he it's *ler*, and if it's a she it's *lar*; but you don't catch me saying 'lar' nor 'ler,' y'know; *I* says 'lay'—betwixt and between, d'y'see, and goes with both." Again he lifted his glass. "Madame, votter santy—ah lay vott, Madame!"

"Amazing!" Dick Stewart said. "My dear Madame, *you* couldn't speak French like that! No, not by a long chalk you couldn't! My dear sir, I'm perfectly proud of you; you speak French like a native."

"Think so?" The ex-constable did not look well pleased. "Bedod," he said, "I'm English, *I* am. I'm not no native, as fur as I'm aware."

"Oh, I don't mean you're a foreigner, you know," Dick Stewart explained. "A native of England, I mean."

That puzzled the ex-constable; but, "You're very civil, sir," he said. "Your health!"

"And now, do you know, I almost think I begin to understand why you are abroad," Dick Stewart went on. "Speaking the lingo as you do, you thought you would—ah—depart to—to abroad, for your leave, for a change from—Clacton, for instance, as you say. Nice place, Clacton; salubrious place. Clacton, but——"

"Bless your heart, sir, *I'm* not on no leave, not me!" the ex-policeman said with emphasis. "Don't want no leave at all nowadays! Sing'ler thing, but now I've cut the Force, it's like leave all the time, if you'll believe me. Kind o' complete change, d'y'see." He puffed out a long breath of relief. "Such ridic'lous things you has to do when you're in the Force. There's women, furinstans—no good

argefying with women, not a bit : you could argefy your leg off and it's all the same. And if suppose yor lays one single finger on 'em, to move 'em on, it's 'you brute, you great brute, call yourself a *man*, do you ?' and all that."

"Exactly," Dick Stewart said. "At least, so I have been told. No experience myself ; I'm a bachelor."

"Women is getting that odacious, sir, there's no knowing what to do with 'em. Holds public meetings open air, and carries on awful. I tell you what, sir, what with women and dishonest old parties and the Lor, it's almost like being out of quod, being out of the Force is. Not as ever I was in quod myself, except official—but in a manner of speaking, furinstans, d'y'see ?"

"Exactly," Dick Stewart said. "In a manner of speaking, for instance ; I quite see that. But, my dear man, I don't at all understand your dislike for the Law. Of course you know more about it than I do, but——"

"Well now, you will allow as the Lor puts the wrong man in quod most times, won't you, sir ?" the ex-policeman said.

"Will I ?" Dick Stewart exclaimed, with a great show of wonder. "No, indeed I won't. You quite shock me ! For instance ?"

"Well, furinstans, then, putting it this way : as there was a burglar, as was a deserving enough burglar most times, as a rich party as had ought to have knowed better gets to pinch something as he daresn't pinch himself ?"

"But—I don't understand," Dick Stewart said inquiringly. "Do people pinch ? I don't mean children, but——"

The ex-constable set down his glass rather impatiently. "Stealing's the polite West End for it, maybe, but 'pinching's' the professional word."

"Oh, is it, indeed ? Thank you, officer ; I know I am very ignorant about these things. 'Pinching' is the word, is it ? I see. If one pinches one's finger, one steals one's finger ? I see."

"Very well, then, sir ; it's a queer start, but—putting it this way : as the burglar only got fifty quid for pinching the pictur——"

"*Picture!*" Stewart gave a start. "Picture? You—you don't mean a portrait, that was pinched from Saumur, do you, by any chance? . . . Because, if you *do!*" . . . He stared at the ex-policeman, and then whistled a low bar. "By Jove!"

VI

WITH wonder and doubt the ex-constable stared at Stewart. "Portrait! Bless your heart, sir, who's talking about portraits? *I* weren't, were I? Pictur, *I* said: *I* didn't say portrait, not so fur as I'm aware on. Mind you, I'm not swearing as it mightn't be a portrait, and I'm not taking no oaths as it were! Pictur, *I'm* saying—pictur! Might be a portrait or mightn't, as the case might be, N. or M., your godfathers and mothereses, and so on. One good thing about the Force, it learns you not to give yourself away."

"Exactly," said Dick Stewart. "I see. You are not sure whether it was a portrait or not. . . . And, of course, you can't be meaning the affair at Saumur. You mean some picture that was pinched in England? Go on, if you please."

"Very well, then; what I was a-saying was, as supposing a honest bookie——"

"Bookie?" Dick Stewart inquired.

"Betting-man's the polite West End for it," the ex-policeman said shortly. "Turf accountant, if you prefers it, sir. Very well, then, put it this way: as supposing the Lor had put the bloke in quod as wasn't the chief bloke in the pinching. I don't name no names, d'y'see, but supposing the chief bloke got the pictur for only fifty quid! And t'other bloke in quod for it, and the chief bloke getting orf gay! Classy kind of old party he is too, Body says, as ort to know better, if fair was done. 'Twasn't exity, d'y'see? And supposing a honest bookie gets to know as where the chief bloke is, and as how to get at him for it, so as to make him disgorge, as they calls it. Well, I puts it to you, sir, what ort a honest man to do, when he hears about a disgraceful affair like that? Hadn't he ort to go

and make the chief bloke fork out, and give the pro-ceeds—expenses and c'mission paid, o' course—to the poor bloke as went to quod for it? . . . If Body and me don't do it, who do you think as will? Bless your heart, sir, you don't reckon as the Lor's going to do it?"

"My dear sir," Dick Stewart said, "I give it up—I simply give it up. I never was the least good at riddles. And please don't begin to explain," he went on hurriedly. "I almost think I understand you better when you don't explain. . . . You seem to be getting warm again, by-the-by. Never mind the iniquities of the Lor; hold your glass, will you? Let me help you . . ."

"No thanks!" the ex-constable said hastily. "Not me! One's enough for a teetotaler."

"Ah, you are a teetotaler," Dick Stewart said blandly.

"Life one," said the ex-policeman; "when I'm at home I am. Only—what with the water full of microbes and things——"

"Exactly," said Stewart. "Then, my dear sir, if you are not over here as a judge of wine, or a tourist——"

"I'm over here on business—ekity business—if you wants to know."

"Oh, I don't in the least," said Dick Stewart.

"Then I wants to tell you," said the ex-policeman, promptly. "I'm over here on business, d'y'see—travelling. Like yourself, furinstans. For my firm."

"Ah, yes," said Dick Stewart; "your firm. I am glad you are firm, by-the-by. We ought always to be firm."

"You don't understand me, sir," said the other. "I mean I'm a man o' business now. Pardner. In a firm." He took something from a pocket. "Our card, sir—firm of Shott and Body, agents. I'm Shott."

"Are you? Are you indeed!" Dick Stewart's eyes were dancing. "Where? Much? Doesn't it hurt you?"

He smiled as he watched the slow effect of that, and when he saw Mr. Shott begin to comprehend, he went hurriedly on—

"But there, Mr. Shott, I do very really beg your pardon again! Must be the hot weather, I think—it can't be Madame's wine makes me talk like that. And I haven't

been drinking water, so it can't be the microbes and things! . . . Singular thing, but when I'm in this vein, Mr. Shott. . . . But you don't really mind me doing it, do you? Have a cigar with me, and overlook it. There, you *are* overlooking it," he went on, for he saw Mr. Shott begin to shake with his noiseless laughter. . . . "There, it has tired us, that laugh has," Stewart said, a minute or so afterward. "Sit down again. I think you'll find this a pretty decent weed. English cigar—almost my last, by-the-by. *Won't you sit down?*"

"Rather smoke it as I go, sir, if you don't mind. I'd ort to be orf, d'y'see. Rather busy to-day, as it happens."

"I am very glad to hear it, Mr. Shott. I like to see people busy. Other people, I mean. And, of course, when you're in a Firm"—he looked at the card—"Is Mr. Body also very busy? I suppose he will be an agent, too?"

"Body's a bookie," said Mr. Shott. "Body'll lay you a hundred to one any day, any hoss in the field, promiscuous. Body's my brother-in-law. When I come into my bit o' money I went pardners along of Body. Body lays the money, and I receives the letters at Boulogne."

"Exactly. Find business pretty good here, do you? Pretty good for France—mere foreigners, I mean, of course?"

"Dunno yet," said Mr. Shott, cautiously. "I'm on this bit of ekity business just now, d'y'see, and I dunno. But I'm hoping. Bit of all right, as fur as I'm aware on. Body says it is, anyhow. It was Body as got to know where the old party was gone to. From an American as had had a letter. Ticklish bit o' business, and I haven't got no apintment with the old party, but I'm hoping."

"I hope so, too, my dear Mr. Shott—I hope you'll tickle it successfully. I suppose you're making the running?"

"Bless your heart, sir—don't mention no running! Walking's bad enough—sing'ler thing they don't have no trains about here. How d'you account for it, sir?"

"I don't," Dick Stewart said. "But why shouldn't you ride one of your own horses, Mr. Shott? More in keeping, wouldn't it be?"

"Bless your heart, sir, *I* never had a hoss—never was across one all my born days. Don't know nothing about hosses, *I* don't."

"Ah," said Dick Stewart, blandly, looking at the card again. "Then it will be Mr. Body who understands horses, I suppose? I hope that one of you does. I see you are agents. Reminds me of what that sharp young shaver said. . . . Ah, yes—Mr. Shott, you—you are sure your name is Mr. Shott, and not Signor Faldalaldo?"

"Eh? What? Which kind of a name's that?" said Mr. Shott.

"Because I think I have met your son Coco?"

"Where?" cried Mr. Shott, with an expression of great surprise. "Which? My son Cocoa? When, sir? If you've met my son Cocoa, it's more nor I ever did myself! So fur as I'm aware on, that is. Didn't know I ever had a son Cocoa! Not to my knowledge, that is, anyhow!"

"No, Mr. Shott?" Dick Stewart asked. "You are certain? Not a smart young zebra with a sharp nose that smokes—the boy does, I mean—and calls himself Coco, and says his father's an agent? . . . Agent means policeman here!"

Mr. Shott dropped the cigar on the table. "Blest if I knows what you means, sir, with your zebras and Cocos! You seen *my* son? My son *Cocoa*? As says he's a zebra and his father's police? Bedod, no son o' mine! Not so fur as I'm aware on, that is—*might* be, o' course—I *might* be such a darmed fool as to have a son, and call him Cocoa! Or coffee, or tea, matter o' that! Or even chocolate! Ho yes, I *might*—anything possible, so I've heard."

"Exactly," said Dick Stewart. "One never knows. But I must be wrong—it is somebody else's son Coco, very likely. Never mind, my dear Mr. Shott—forget it, forget and forgive—it is nothing!" But Mr. Shott was hardly heeding him.

"Can't be *my* son Cocoa," the putative father was saying. "'Cause I never was married, d'y'see. Not as fur as I'm aware on. . . . I *could* ha' got married, orfen, o' course, if I'd liked to. . . . When I was on them Pimlico

beats, there wasn't a gel down any o' them aireys as wouldn't ha' jumped at me. Police is very fascinating to gels. I *could* ha' been married and had a son Cocoa, of course. . . ."

"Of course, Mr. Shott—a handsome man like you, in a lovely uniform. . . . But there; it doesn't matter. He was *not* your son, the sharp young rascal! So there's an end of it."

"He'll be somebody's son, I dare say," Mr. Shott went on. "A sharp young shaver, were he? If I was to have a son o' my own, I expect he would be like that. A sharp young shaver was what I used to be myself. . . . But I never was christened Cocoa, not so fur as I'm aware on. . . ."

"My dear Mr. Shott, never mind—don't trouble your clever head any more about him. He can take care of himself pretty well, can that particular young rogue. You have dropped your cigar—let me give you a light. There—that all right? Decent weed, I hope. . . . Very well then, if you *won't* sit down again, why—à *tantot*, Mr. Shott! And if you'll take this franc, to buy some fresh eggs with? Thank you, Mr. Shott. À *tantot*—see you again some day, I hope. . . . You are quite sure you are not over here to arrest anybody?"

Mr. Shott set down his bag and umbrella again, and withdrew the cigar from between his lips.

"Sir," he said solemnly, "do you happen to know anything about the Lor?"

"Can't say I do," said Dick Stewart. "I pretend to, but nobody does. King's Counsel don't—Judges don't—the Law Courts Beadle himself doesn't. So, my dear Mr. Shott, how should I?"

"If you know'd half nor a quarter what I knows about the Lor, you'd be sure as I couldn't be over here to arrest nobody! Not in these privit clothes, I couldn't, tish't the Lor! The *Lor*!" He snorted his contempt. "That was one o' the things as made me cut it! I've no patience, it's that stupid! Bless your heart, sir, if you'll believe me, supposing as you're a p'leece-officer and sitting at home in your shirt-sleeves having your tea comfortable on leave and your uniform orf, furinstans—I'm putting it to you that way——"

"Exactly," said Stewart.

"And folks outside beginning to yell Fire and Murder and all that, awful, and you jumping out and finding a blind-drunk arf killing his own wife—well, what then? What then, d'y'suppose?" His tone grew tragic. "Why, I'll tell you what then! It 'ud be more nor your place was worth to arrest him!"

"No!" Dick Stewart exclaimed. "You don't really mean to tell me that?"

"You take my word for it, sir, it wouldn't—it's a fact, you couldn't lay a finger on him! Not till you'd put on your tunic and trousers!"

"Oh—well. . . ."

"And your helmet, official! And the blind-drunk arf murdering his wife while you're doing it! Ridic'ulous! But that's the Lor!"

"Good heavens above!" cried Dick Stewart. "My dear Madame, you can't imagine what remarkable things this remarkable Mr. Shott is telling me! But I don't dispute it, Mr. Shott—you are in the way to know, of course. So that's the Law, is it? Yet—you will think me disgracefully ignorant, but—tell me, if a blind-drunk can't lawfully half-murder his own wife, whose wife can he?"

Mr. Shott looked hurt; he had perceived the drift of that in less than half a minute.

"Sing'ler thing, I can't never get nobody to take it serious," he said, half to himself, half in reproof to his audience. "Sir, you been gammoning me—you're kidding—you're trying to pull my leg! I thought you was a gent. . . . I didn't consider it of you!" He took up his bag and umbrella. "Arternoon, sir!" Slowly he began to move off. "Bon jewer, Madame!" Solemn and stolid, he marched away, splashing up the dust. . . .

Dick Stewart turned to the wondering little woman contritely.

"Madame," he said, "I have behaved abominably—to what is a very honest fellow in his way."

"Truly, M'sieur?"

"Yes, and I'm ashamed of it . . . I'm ashamed too late—I always do things too late—habit of mine, confound

my habits! Mr. Shott! *Mr. Shott!* Forgive me, Mr. Shott!" he called out, with compunction. "*À tantôt*, my dear Mr. Shott, *à tantôt!*" and would have waved a friendly hand. But the stolid and offended Shott never turned his head.

"There! he is hurt," Dick Stewart said, looking glum. "Of course he is—my chaff was *very* enough to offend a rhinoceros! Madame!"—he turned upon her frowningly—"you'll not attempt to deny that I behaved to him abominably!"

"Did you, M'sieur? *Tiens, tiens!* I did not understand the words," the little woman said, holding her knitting up to her eyes and counting stitches. "Not knowing the droll language. But I comprehended M'sieur Faldalaldo's manner, of course. The comical one is a nobody. And M'sieur was to him the aristocrat."

"The cad, I fear!" Dick Stewart said with contrition. "Though if you had understood our droll language, Madame, you would have known that I only meant it for chaff. Chaff? I don't know what right *I* have to chaff a simple, earnest fellow like that! Chaff, as I need not tell you, Madame, is chopped hay. Chaff is dry. It chokes, sometimes. I believe people feed horses on chaff. Also asses. And Shott is a very worthy kind of ass. 'Twasn't equity of me, though. . . . One of the drawbacks of chaff is that sometimes it gets in your eyes. . . . Madame!"

"M'sieur!"

"I could almost weep for my confoundedly insolent treatment of Mr. Shott! It sticks in my throat."

"*Tiens!*" cried the little Madame. "Will M'sieur have some more wine?"

"No, thank you. You see, dear Madame, one gets so into the habit—confound all habits!—of chaffing or patronizing people who are kind enough to consider themselves one's inferiors. . . . I really don't know which is the worse—their looking up to us, or our looking down on them! . . . Oh yes, I do—it's our infernal cheek in looking down on them! . . . Madame, did you ever see a mule looking down on an ass? Mules do, I assure you. I've seen them do it! I am acquainted with some very aristocratic

mules in London. Shott's an ass, and so am I ; only I'm mule as well, with a bit of pedigree in me ; that's all the difference ! ”

“ M'sieur should soothe himself,” the little woman said. “ Will not M'sieur smoke another of his large cigars ? ”

“ Talking rubbish like that ! Chaffing a decent fellow like that ! ” Dick Stewart angrily went on. “ And I've so much else to think of, too. . . . Madame, I deserve to fail ; I am unworthy to search for the violet sapphires ! I can forget all about them, it seems, in badinage and *blague*.”

“ Ah bah !—it is nothing,” the little woman cried. “ The comical one, he did not much comprehend. Only at the last was he offended. M'sieur Faldalaldo has behaved like a gentleman to me. . . . And what, then ? Why not ? ” she went on. “ Why comes such a comical one here at all ? He is shamefully wasteful with eggs. I could have made three omelettes with them,” she said, looking down at the fragments. “ Did we want him here, that comical one ? Did we invite him ? Why comes he ? What is his business ? ”

Stewart looked thoughtful. “ Yes, by Jove ! ” he said quickly, “ I—I should very much like to know what his business here is, Madame.”

“ Ah bah !—it is nothing again, nothing ! . . . Unless—bon enfant de Marie !—unless he too is searching for the sapphires.”

“ I wonder,” Dick Stewart thought—“ I wonder if he is ? . . . Hatton Garden seemed to astonish him, when I mentioned it. . . . And he said something about an American fellow, who had had a letter—— ”

“ If M'sieur will not think about it,” the little woman said, recalling his attention ; “ if M'sieur will go on telling me—— ”

“ Telling you, Madame ? Ah yes, to be sure, I was going to tell you how I have searched for the sapphires so far. Yes, I will, with pleasure. Let us forget the worthy Shott ; he is now round the corner : he has vanished. I will tell you, Madame, and then you shall advise me. . . . Well, the first thing I did was to procure the use of an automobile.”

Merrily the little woman laughed, putting the knitting up to her mouth to hide a certain lack of teeth in it.

"An automobile? M'sieur had much better have procured himself the use of a spade!"

"Of a spade? Why of a spade?" He slightly shuddered.

"Parbleu! is not lost treasure always buried, as if dead? M'sieur's sapphires will have been buried, *pour sûr!*"

"I hope not," he said gravely. "They will live for many a year, I trust. Yet I have some reason to suppose they are shrined—they belong to a saint. I think they are shrined in a Château Royal. . . . That is why I first promenaded myself (as Madame says) in a wild mad automobile to Versailles."

"Said I not so?" she exclaimed. "At Versailles is the Château Royal!"

"*The* one, *par excellence*," he agreed. "But there are others, Madame—a whole lot! There are so many others, Madame; I make out there are forty-two others. Madame, it is incredible the number of once-Royal châteaux there are in your beautiful France! In the naughty old days, before the rule of your excellent Republic and my respected young friend M. Bodinton, your magnificent kings, they—how shall I say it, Madame, to your blushes?—they—whenver they bought a fresh beauty—they built a new château for her, Madame. As a frame for a tableau of love; if you can call it that, by-the-by."

"*Bien sûr*," she said severely. "I have heard about *that*. Such nonsense! Wasting money on nonsense!"

"By consequence, Madame, there are forty-two possible hiding-places for me to visit, one after the other. I am not sure that there aren't forty-three or forty-four! . . . And I cannot so patiently wait, Madame—Madame will comprehend that I cannot so patiently wait?"

"*Pour sûr*," she said, more sympathetically this time, for a note of feeling had sounded in his voice.

Himself he recognized it too; this jesting talk was turning into something more serious, which he had not intended; but he felt a relief and lightening, and he went on—

"A week I waited at Versailles, but did the sapphires show themselves to me? Madame, they did not! I went to the Château of the Louvre, but did they bless my eyesight there? They did not! There is also St. Germain's. And further, Compiègne. Moreover, Fontainebleau. Likewise, Marly. Rambouillet, too." He paused.

"And M'sieur did not see them—no? *Tiens, tiens!* Not anywhere?"

"Not anywhere, Madame! Not that I could perceive. Perhaps I did not wait long enough at each place. Perhaps I had not gone away a moment when peep! the violet sapphires watched me go. . . . But Madame will comprehend what I hoped—how at each disappointment I must mount my wild mad automobile and promenade myself in a hurry to the next place of search?"

"Pour sûr!"

"There's the Château de Blois on the Loire. There's the Château de Chambord in the forest. Also Amboise, and Chenonceaux, Chinon, Chaumont, Loches, Langeais . . . and so forth. All frames for tableaux of Royal love-making, in their day, as Madame will remember from her reading of history."

Madame assumed an erudite air. "Bien sûr. Such nonsense! . . . And—nowhere, M'sieur?"

"Nowhere!" Sadly he said it. "I have promenaded myself through whole avenues and processions of châteaux, Madame. I have worked the poor automobile till it has hardly a leg to stand on. Last I went to the château at Pau, but no sapphires there. And now I am here, Madame. I am here because this is the High Limousin. My friend M. Bodinton said something about the High Limousin that—well, anyhow, I am here. As Madame perceives and hears. Sapphireless, Madame! And searching still."

"Poor M'sieur Faldalaldo," she said pityingly, "there is no Château Royal about here! M'sieur is here to no purpose; M'sieur might as well depart at once! Where is his wild mad auto?"

"Dismissed, Madame—sent to Limoges, with my malediction at its tail! An auto is a machine of ill-luck. An auto is an anti-mascotte, Madame. An auto sneers at you;

I could hear mine scorning me all the way up from Pau, 'You're a fool!' it said, 'but keep on in me long enough, and——'" He paused; he was mentally recalling that gradual growing buzz; that whirr, as of a great locust; the hoarse, persistent warning that something impended; that accumulated momentum; that sense of being whirled to the edge. "Motor-cars are too new and fashionable yet for us to understand their meaning," he thought. "But the very deuce is in them, if only we knew!" Then he spoke. "Yes, I got rid of the auto, Madame; what did it ever bring me but bad luck!"

"Bien sûr," she said approvingly. "Me also, I like them not, the carriages of the devil; they have killed me nine hens! . . . Yet M'sieur cannot always walk? M'sieur will lame his feet. What M'sieu requires is a horse; also a cabriolet. It just happens that my cousin Georges, he has one—a mylord very respectable, nice yellow wheels. At only ten francs the day, with the mare Courtequeue. . . . M'sieur will not have it—no?"

He had shaken his head. "No, indeed, dear Madame, I thank you. I prefer the mare of Shanks. I walk, to chance it; that is why I pad my own hoof. I go as I please—as Fortune may please, I mean. No Château Royal about here, you say? Ah, Madame—who knows? Perhaps there is. Perhaps it will come to meet me—a château that walks! Maybe I shall find it at Provenchel."

He put money on the table and picked up his pack. "Perhaps the sapphires may peep at me over the first high wall. Who knows?"

"I know," said she, knitting busily. "M'sieur goes to more disappointments, c'est tout! M'sieur had much better give it up at once. No Château Royal anywhere here."

He gave a whimsical grimace. "Is *that* the Wise Woman's opinion? Dear Madame, you desolate me!" He swung his stick. "And yet, if I am to believe the boy——"

"What boy, M'sieur?"

"Nothing, Madame—a fantastic boy, a deuce of a boy; not a boy at all, I dare say, but a demon of a boy—an imp! Probably a boy that doesn't exist. I fancy I've fancied

that boy! . . . The strangest people one sees about here, by-the-by! . . . But not a Château Royal? You are sure, dear Madam—*bien sûr?* ”

“Too sure, my poor M'sieur so gentil—*trop sûr!* ”

There was more than whim and humour in his sigh, as he moved away.

VII

By five o'clock in the afternoon that inn of fantastic interviews lay miles behind, and Signor Francis Benedick Faldalaldo had reached to the foot of a wooded hill that rose at the edge of a plateau. He had quitted the highway and followed a footpath aside. "A highway," he had thought, "is like duty, that goes in dust and monotony on to its aim; but footpaths are gay caprice. Footpaths tempt the foot; footpaths suggest relief from pebbles, and hint of hidden romantic places." Yet he did not take the first of the footpaths which tempted him aside, nor the second, nor the third; but the seventh, because he thought that perhaps the luck of the perfect number might help. Habit had tweaked him and reason reproached him for that; he was acting like an imbecile, they told him again.

"Nothing new, that!" was his mental answer. "As an imbecile I'm always easily first!"

Yet could it be imbecility to do what he now was doing—to take to his embrace the breast of Earth and live the slow comfortable life of "the country green?" "Dance and Proverbal song and sunburnt mirth," he quoted as he went on; though this was not Provence, but the Limousin. Heather and furze and bracken and broom, every knoll and hillock purple or yellow or dark with juniper bushes; green meadows lying in the hollows of the wide and open campaign; feathery birches waving, silver-white against russet copses of chestnut; spreads of dry lavender here and there, and now and again the azure mirror of a pool.

No, not imbecile this; this was what Oliver Goldsmith did, and Laurence Sterne—this was what John Evelyn did, when he "footed it through pleasant fields and meadows"

in France, and "nothing came amiss." "Imbecility, eh? Then for Heaven's sake let me be imbecile!" he rejoiced, for he was enjoying his shogging along. This wandering way amidst glittering rocks and luxuriant woodlands, green meads and flashing waters was sheer delight.

Something artificial had been shogged away from him already, he was a younger and happier Dick Stewart than he had been for weeks. He laughed aloud, a pealing and hearty laugh, as he remembered his interview with Mr. Short, and his opening his mind to the little inn-woman. He jested at the idea of his yesterday self, morosely tuff-tuffing along, artificially hideous in goggles, in exaggerated barnacles! "Yes, barnacles!" he thought. "Habits are barnacles. They fasten on you, stick to you, and ruin you. But I fancy I'm shogging a few of 'em away."

Yet shogging tires you. Dance and Provençal song and sunburnt mirth are things for the evening cool. And he was shogging along alone. Perhaps it is better to gipsy along with some careless group and caravan, not alone. Mirth and swing began to leave him, but sunburn remained. The implacable heat and radiance of what seemed an unquenchable sun were at their worst at four o'clock; they tried him, tanned him, dampened and darkened the ruddy crisp hair at his temples, and made the warm wallet a load. "Phew-w-w!" he whistled, "the temperature of the country green!"

There was something good about Town, after all, he began to think. You could have shade in Town. It would be cool in his dim old den at Lincoln's Inn Fields, with the Girtins and Varleys shining out on the panelled walls. It would be shady within the red old church through the Sardinia Street archway, where amidst a hush that seemed made of whispers of bygone prayers, the violet sapphires had been seen.

His right foot was paining him. "Not the best boots for walking, I dare say—didn't expect I should do this, of course," he reflected. Yes, he must really rest his foot a bit. There would be shadow yonder, under the trees on the hillside; when he reached the shadow he would rest. And when through casual vineyards warm and green, and final

fields of dun and crimson, the footpath brought him to the tawny chestnut wood which clad a gentle ridge, he loosed the wallet, let it fall, and dropped beside it with a grateful joy. Ouf ! He would have a rest, a good long rest.

He lay supine in brown shadow, his head on a pillow of moss ; a pillow so soft and resilient that it might have been a breast of Dian's, heaving under the green velvet which she dons for the chase. Silently he lay, himself now a part of the great peace and stillness of the world. He had begun to whistle again, but had checked himself, for surely this was Nature's siesta hour. He remembered classic words—"It is forbidden, O shepherds, to play the flute of an afternoon. For then Great Pan is resting from the chase ; and Pan is irascible, with anger always near his lips." Pan, the jolly god of field and glade—Pan, with the horns and hoofs and tail, that Gothic artists turned into the devil—poor old Pan, that was now Old Nick ! A myriad little insect pipes were sounding in the grass, a tiny immensity of trilling and creaking, that sounded like the frying of bubbling butter—those little pipers were unafraid of Pan.

Deliciously he rested, rested, till coolness and easy breathing came. Then he sat up, felt for his pipe, drew it out, blew through it pip-pip, affectionately fingered it, artistically filled it, luxuriously lit it, slowly sent out the first grey waft, and then looked lazily back upon the way he had come, across the vast chessboard of the world. Ah, what a board ! And for what a game ! "And I'm trying the right game at last !" he thought.

The distant stretches of rye and buckwheat and maize lay in sound but luminous sleep ; trees of all shades of bronze-colour watched them as they slept, gently fanning them—"keeping the flies off !" he thought. A pleasant land, this Limousin, with its vast distances, its undulating moors majestic, its huddles of grey rock, its purple patches of heather, its tongues of flaming gorse, and overhead, seen between leaves, its sky of bluebell hue. "As golden a landscape as ever John Varley painted," he thought. "And look at the distance ! Iris-blue, Varley's own blue !" Could there be anywhere in this wide still

world of beauty a thing so horrible as a London? The landscape lay offering up its calm loveliness to the sun.

And now, reclining and motionless himself, he began to be aware of the slow majestic motion of it all. Earth was turning, turning—turning through the last of the brilliant hot sunshine into the coolness of shadow—turning for him. For him the honeyed hum of the bees, for him the cheery tweet-tweet of pert little birds, for his eye the amber and blue of heaths along the horizon; for his eye the stately constant and procession of clouds went on. Central in it all, he was alone but not lonely; the breast of Earth was kindly and sociable; life buzzed, leapt, rustled, glided on, to keep him company; and lapping and encircling and protecting him the great breathing plateau spread.

Was that the worthy Robertus Shott on the highroad yonder? Two or three times that afternoon it had seemed to Stewart that he was being followed stealthily—perhaps by Mr. Shott. No, it was somebody going the other way. Perhaps it might be Mr. Shott returning—returning from his “equity business.” What business? “Extraordinary fellow, Shott,—off his top a little, *sans doute!* Too delightfully crazy for anything, Shott. . . . Yet I don’t know—I wish I could find out what he meant about the ‘chief bloke’ and the picture. . . . Don’t suppose he would follow me, anyhow. . . . Extraordinary fellow in some things, and yet a type in his way. Sort of fellow who joins the Salvation Army out of disgust, convinced that everything else is rotten. The Lor isn’t moral, he said. Quite right, Shott, it isn’t! Wonder if you find business any—any moraler, by-the-by? . . . Treated him badly—ought to apologize—will if I can. Wonder if he’d let me tip him a solatium? If he won’t, I’ll back a certain loser with him—same thing.”

No, it was not Mr. Shott on the highroad; it was somebody quite different—that was plainly visible now. Somebody who didn’t carry a bag of eggs and an umbrella; perhaps a Signor Faldalaldo. Oh yes, there would sure to be a Signor Faldalaldo somewhere in this wide world of coincidence. The highroad seemed to have got along

very well without Dick Stewart; it lay across the landscape like the white wake of a ship that had gone on. Like a staid adult, unromantic, the highroad kept to the level, with steady and dutious purpose to turn at the quickest and shortest the flank of this interfering hill. Around the hill it would wind and wend till it came to some old town of littleness and quiet—Provenchel, no doubt; and there it would rest awhile, as Stewart was resting now.

The path through the wood, above and behind him, would be a short cut to the quiet old town. Temptingly the footpath wound as it mounted, and there were narrow frolicking tracks that climbed beside it, like youngsters at their mother's skirts. "Coming with you presently!" Dick Stewart almost said, as if the little tracks could have heard him. Presently he would lift himself up, don ~~the~~ pack, mount the ridge, on the crest of it come in sight of a sunset horizon, and descend to the quiet old town for the night. "But not now—not just yet—presently—plenty of time. I'm very cosy here—I'm like Whitman—

'Here by myself, away from the clang of the world,
Tarrying and talked to by tongues aromatic.'"

Idly and happily he lay musing. He was rested now, but—no hurry! He had hoped to reach Château X before evening, he had meant to push incessantly on till he reached the secret's clue. But to wait expectantly might be wiser; the little woman at the inn had rather shaken his hope. Luck, it would be all luck, not effort, if he succeeded. Let him wait, and wait, and listen; perhaps in "airs and floating echoes" the capricious word and cue would come. Besides, waiting would prolong hoping. "And hoping's better than realizing, nine times out of ten," thought this young philosopher on his back, as he looked up to infinite inter-stellar spaces where every star and planet waits its hour. "Who was it said that anticipation is the best as well as the worst of life? It was some sensible Johnny, anyhow!"

Effort there must be, of course, and presently he would

be reasonably energetic again. Presently he would make an effort and "move on," as Mr. Shott would say. But effort need never be hasty and ugly—not for the forethoughtful, at any rate. "The great wheel of the world rolls on, all the same," he reflected, "effort or no effort of ours. We put out our strength, to push it on or retard it, but the wheel rolls on all the same. We can't help putting our hands out to interfere with it; and if we didn't, some element in the whole would be missing, I dare say; no doubt we are cogs in the machinery, we have our use and play our part. But,"—he put his hand to his right ankle a moment—the ache there had been a hint; pushers at Juggernaut sometimes stumbled in their haste, right under the rolling death. . . .

Lazily his hand went to his pocket for a match. Something in his pocket rustled, and he drew the something out. It was a newspaper hardly bigger than a handkerchief, a news-sheet which ignored every country but France and every part of France but part of the banks of one French river. It was a back number, too, with a column in it marked. It was that respectable, dull, small weekly the *Phare de la Loire*.

Dick Stewart sat up suddenly, remembering acutely again the boy at the quarry and his policeman father; also a certain presentiment of his own at Saumur. He unfolded the *Phare* and re-read the marked column very thoughtfully. "I wonder what Shott meant, with his talk about a stolen picture?" He put his hand to his breast pocket, and drew out a photograph, to regard it again for a minute. Then he let the newspaper and the photograph rest beside him on the moss.

"Mysterious Disappearance," were the words which headed the marked column in the *Phare*. "Mysterious disappearance, indeed! the whole thing is mysterious, from one end to the other." He thought of another mysterious disappearance—of how the violet sapphires had disappeared. He lit his pipe again, leaned back on his elbow, and mused.

Mr. Shott had expressly mentioned a stolen picture;

there had been a theft of a picture from Saumur; and Stewart had felt a presentiment about that, ten days ago.

"How far may one sanely harbour a presentiment?" he now wondered. Ten days ago what seemed a preposterous premonition had struck him—yes, "struck" is the word, so suddenly and with so much external force it had come upon him. Ten days ago, at Saumur. He had ridiculed himself for that, ten days ago at Saumur; but now——

Now his whole mood and frame of mind had changed. They had begun to change at Saumur; they had modified during his journey from Angers to Pau. He knew that, now. On the way up from Pau to the Limousin the change had crystallized; he recognized that, now. But for the incident at Saumur he might never have dismissed the motor-car and taken to Shanks, his mare. . . .

What is a presentiment? Tolerantly he asked himself that, now. A message from the spirit to that sophisticated organ, the brain! A prompting from one's inmost and finest consciousness—from the crystal source of ideas and visions? From the consciousness which sleeps while the brain is lively, and wakes when the brain is tired? A presentiment is surely a stirring of instinct. Had he not felt a verified presentiment five weeks ago, in the old red church?

"But what is instinct?" his thoughts went on. "The inherent guide which animals possess. Uneducated, unsophisticated animals, that is—the 'learned pig' at a show will have lost something of it, no doubt. And just so with mankind. In days 'when Adam laid out his first penny in apples at a stall in Mesopotamia,' mankind exchanged the faculty of instinct for the habit of thought. Silver for pewter, gold for brass. Animals are wiser than we. Animals do what is best for them because they know no other course of action than the best, and they know the best from the first. The untended baby dies—the young partridge *runs* out of the shell. . . ."

"We have lost the power of knowing spontaneously; we shed the faculty of instinct when we put on the habit of thought. Ever since then we have been but clumsily wise. Wise and discontented, 'sicklied o'er with the pale

cast of thought.' . . . But the old faculty is not yet utterly dead in us. Promptings come at times, we have moments of vision, suggestions well up from the inner deeps. The dearest and noblest things are done by us on instinct. Sudden love"—his heart stirred—"and inevitable hatred. A presentiment is a stir of instinct. It was instinct stirring that gave me the hint at Saumur. I don't know why or how, of course. No use inquiring why. One can't reason about a thing like that."

Yes, indeed, what the vanishing of a doubtful portrait in oils could have to do with Stewart's quest in France was more than ratiocination could explain. And yet at Saumur he had suddenly known that somehow the vanishing of the violet sapphires and the disappearance of the picture were connected. The disparity between that strong conviction and the weakness of its apparent cause had irritated him at Saumur. But now——

VIII

THE pipe hung slack and his head lay pillowed again while his mind went back on what had occurred at Saumur. On his way to the Château Royal at Angers the car had broken down, and he must wait in the fourth-rate town of Saumur for hours. "Anything to see here?" he had asked after luncheon, while the local smith and the chauffeur were down in a kind of sawpit, covering themselves with oil and cursing the car.

"The river," he had been answered; but he had come along the river-bank all the way from Tours.

"The castle then, M'sieur." But the castle was now a barrack; no violet sapphires there.

"Ma foi, the Musée, perhaps," the waiter suggested, doubtfully, and into the Musée Stewart went, to pass an hour. The curator, a bow-legged little man in a holland blouse and a black fez, who went about the floor of the long garret of a gallery like a pair of callipers waltzing, received him with pathetic enthusiasm; for a visitor there was a rarity almost worth preserving under glass. "Monsieur is English—Monsieur will have specially come from London? About the picture?" The holland blouse trembled with the wearer's excitement.

"About the picture? No, indeed—I fear I have not. What picture?"

The curator showed his disappointment. How? Was it possible that Monsieur had not heard? About the wonderful picture which used to be the glory of the Musée? The picture that had so mysteriously disappeared? Why, many visitors—quite a dozen—had come from Paris specially, about that! At first, that was—not during the

last three or four weeks, it was true. The curator sighed. "Public interest is very fickle, Monsieur!"

"But I am very much interested indeed," Stewart said, with a kindly falsehood that he was afterward to think no falsehood at all. "I am really disgracefully ignorant, but—believe me, very much interested indeed. What a wonderful collection you have here, by-the-by!"

"Ah, Monsieur!" The old man's face beamed with gratification. Then it clouded. "If I could only have shown you the gem of all! Alas! a most vital loss, even for a collection so rich as this—a portrait so historical—such a work of art! And a document of such historical importance! . . . But—" the old shoulders went up and the gouty old fingers out—"c'est la vie!"

"Regardez!" the old man went on, "this is where it used to hang. I gave it the place of honour, in the best light. I reserve the place sacred still, as Monsieur perceives!"

What Dick Stewart perceived was a blank part of a whitewashed wall; a part almost blank, that is, for in the midst of it a small framed photograph was hanging. "If Monsieur will examine the photograph—but here is another"—the curator waltzed to his table and back again—"happily I had this taken a year ago—I have still some copies for sale. If Monsieur? . . ."

"Certainly, if I may?" Dick Stewart put down two francs.

"This is a good example, not too dark. If Monsieur will examine it with this glass? . . . Ah, Monsieur at once recognizes the truth of it, the family likeness, the historical value——"

"Really, do you know, I fear I don't? I'm afraid I must ask you to tell me who it is?"

"Ah, Monsieur. Who but the last Duc de Normandie!" The old man whispered that name.

"The last Duc de ——? Oh yes, I know,—but surely he died when quite a boy?"

"No, Monsieur! He did not, no?" With a polite firmness the curator uttered the contradiction. "He lived,—historians now agree that he lived. They do not agree

as to what became of him, but they acknowledge that he lived. Oh yes, my faith, yes indeed he did! The portrait was a proof of that, it was painted of him at forty years old! Does a boy die at ten and yet have his portrait painted at forty years old? The picture had a pedigree, Monsieur—oh, the proof was complete! It was bequeathed to this important collection"—pompously he mouthed the words—"by a Marquise, who knew him and revered him. What joy for me the day it arrived! I wore my frock-coat to receive it. I receive it, I hang it there, in that prominent place, I guard it, I am proud of it, it is an object of curiosity to many, and of pilgrimage,—yes, of pilgrimage!—to some; my collection becomes almost a shrine! But then, of a sudden, *vlan!* it vanishes! Ah, what a loss to history, to art, to my Musée!" The old man waltzed away to hide his tears and rub his eyes.

"Vanishes?" Dick Stewart echoed, careful not to look round, and staring hard at the whitewashed wall.

"It vanished, Monsieur!" was said in a snuffle from behind.

"But—how was that? How could it vanish?"

Nay, who should say? Who could be clever enough to discover? *How* it vanished was precisely what the curator of all things most desired to know, he said—except how to get it back again.

"This important collection, Monsieur"—he came twisting back—"is visible to the public on four days in the week—Sundays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, from noon till the hour of four; at other times by arrangement with me. . . . Ah, Monsieur's attention wanders, Monsieur regards my other pictures, Monsieur is an amateur of pictures, perhaps?"

"Of water-colour drawings I am."

"Ah, then, I have the most splendid—I will show them to Monsieur in one minute. But I was telling of the vanishing of——"

"Yes, indeed, I beg your pardon," Stewart said.

"It is a Sunday, six weeks ago—I lock up my Musée at four precisely, according to the regulation,—I depart to my game at my café, *also* according to rule." The old

gentleman smiled a little. "The picture, it is then on the wall, I regard it the last thing, as always. Ah, well, I leave it thus, I depart to my game. . . . Monsieur is himself an amateur of dominoes, perhaps?"

"I fear I am not."

"Ah, it is the king of games! Chess, what is chess? . . . But pardon, I digress. The next morning I arrive, to dust and sweep. The door is locked when I arrive; I perceive no signs of infraction; I enter; I put on my blouse; I proceed to sweep, and—*vlan!* The picture is not here! The picture, it is departed. *Ciel*, Monsieur, how I feel faint! Ah, how I tremble! Ah, how I cry out. 'Robbers!' I cry out. 'Murderers!' Then I fall on the floor, I am ill, the concierge he finds me on the floor. . . . Ah, Monsieur, what a mystery! Between afternoon and morning the gem of my Musée has gone! . . . I cannot be consoled, I weep, Monsieur—tenez, I am foolish, I am weeping now——"

Dick Stewart turned away a while. Then, "A very strange affair indeed," he said. "You will have put it in the hands of the gendarmes?"

"In the hands of the Minister of Police—the Ministry of the Interior itself—at Paris!" the old gentleman said proudly. "I have been to Paris about it myself! There is a thousand francs reward—*a thou—sand—francs*, Monsieur! Oh, it is quite an affair of State! The Minister sent for me expressly, he told me himself that he had his suspicions! Tenez, Monsieur!" the excited old gentleman said, "I shall present you with a copy of the 'Phare!' In which you will find an important article! By me. On the picture and its disappearance. I write as an historian, Monsieur, I prove the authenticity of the portrait."

And then to Stewart came like a flash the presentiment, of some tragic intimacy existing between this theft and his quest. "Château Royal, this has something to do with Château Royal, I vow!"

No, not like a flash, but like a word—a word of instinct's—a word from the instinct which sleeps while the brain is active, but sometimes talks in its sleep.

"Talks in its sleep," he now mused, as he shifted his head upon the moss cushion. "As nightingales sing in theirs, when they dream—when they dream a nightingale's dream—when they give, so low you can hardly hear them, the trill and the three long semibreves. . . ." He sat up suddenly. "What's that?"

It was no nightingale; no trill or murmured semibreve had startled him into that exclamation; it was a sudden snort, a snuffing short snort quite near. A curly little pig was staring out at Dick Stewart, and snorting.

Out of the lower leaves of a bush the curly little pig was staring, and something very like tears stood in the little pig's little round, red eyes. The little pig was the curliest little pig imaginable, but not at all a sucking-pig—no baby; a sophisticated little pig that knew life, a sinful little pig, and a pig that was being punished.

It was a mottled little pig, of the colour of mottled soap with more blue than yellow in it. It was a hairy little pig, saucy and perky, with sharp ears and a *retroussé* snout, and a long and waggish tail; a runaway and predatory little pig, that had been nosing under the chestnut trees for truffles on its own account; an epicure of a pig, that epicureanism had led into punishment and pain. Just as a hurt dog will do, it held up its forefoot and begged for first aid to the injured. "Hurt its trotter, little beggar!" Dick Stewart thought.

He had turned his head, but otherwise he did not stir. Pigs are irrational, even when they beg for help, and any abrupt movement of the man's would have frightened the pig away. What the man did was to hold out a slow and gentle hand, as if to a dog—for dogs made friends with Dick Stewart on sight—and "Cochon, petit cochon, mon pauvre petit piggy, why do you weep?" he wooingly said. "Viens donc, pauvre petit cochon, viens donc à moi."

The little pig came out of the bush with a limp.

"Scratched his foot, or sprained it, or something," Dick Stewart thought. "Unusual sort of thing for a pig, but he knows what to do, the little beggar. À moi, donc, pauvre petit cochon de mon coeur?"

He cooed; the little pig limped nearer.

Slowly and noiselessly Dick Stewart felt in a pocket for a bar of chocolate, broke a morsel off, and gently pitched it under the snorting little snout. Piggie curled up his tail, curled down his nose, snuffed at the bit of chocolate, saw that it was truffle-like in colour, rooted at it, licked it, liked it, lipped it up, tasted it completely, bolted it, smacked his lips (so to speak) and began to consider the meaning of this new experience. Yes, this stuff was certainly good; the epicure confessed to himself that he really liked this new and uncommon kind of truffle. It was not leathery, as truffles often are; it melted in the mouth, it tasted sweet, like sugar—yes, this Super-pig who went on two legs had gifts to bestow that were delectable and desirable indeed. Cochon jerked up his snout and snorted for more.

Dick Stewart held out a hand with a piece of chocolate visible in it, and the little pig sidled nearer. In less than two minutes Cochon had eaten his second piece of chocolate, and was licking the beneficent hand. "There, Cochon—there, mon pauvre petit piggy!" The other hand was patting and fondling the mottled flanks. "What, Cochon—more?"

Cochon seemed quite a clean little pig, unused to a dirty sty: Cochon appeared to be a pig of the greenwood, though not at all wild. The Limousin folk, those incorrigible treasure-hunters, use knowing little pigs, as well as sharp-nosed dogs, to bring them to spots where treasure of truffles lies at chestnut roots, as pig-nuts hide in the sod under elms in Worcestershire; so Dick Stewart had read in Evelyn's "Kalendarium," indeed. Cochon would be a truffle-pig escaped. "Hunting on his own, sensible little beggar! And hurt himself, somehow. . . . Here, then, Cochon—here, then—ah, that's the thing!"

The man had thrust out a swift hand and caught the pig by the ear; he pulled it, struggling, down.

Then he soothed and fondled it as he would have fondled and soothed a dog.

"Poor little chap—hurt, are you?" The struggling little body seemed made of steel-wire and indiarubber, but he held it fast and examined the hurt foot. The foot was

lamed and swollen: "You need the vet., petit cochon—I wonder if I could. . . . Lie quiet a minute,—yes, like that!" Chocolate had been administered again. "Now then, let me see what I can do for you."

Dick Stewart tore his handkerchief into three narrow strips, carefully knotted them into one, and began to wind this silken bandage around the swollen trotter. The little pig permitted this to be done. The little pig appeared to understand that this Super-pig, dispenser of luscious truffles, could mean a poor ordinary little pig no harm. "There, then! if you'll let it rest a bit—if you'll keep off your pins as much as possible, old chap! . . . Lie still—quiet, now! . . . Yes, that's right, shut your blinkers! . . . Try to go to sleep."

Cochon must have been tired by his lameness, for now, having occupied the Super-pig and detained him there in the way of luck, Cochon in a minute dropped soundly asleep; in fact, he promptly snored. Dick Stewart watched him. Cochon lay snoring gently—if ever a snore can be gentle—with only an occasional loud snort and spasmodical start. But he did not wake himself. He lay on his right flank, all his four curly little legs off the ground, the trotters dangling. Each time he snorted in his sleep his whole body shook, and his impertinent little snout was jerked forward, for a long second. During that long second one little round eye would peep through a sleepy slit. Then he would relapse, and snooze again.

Sleeping is contagious. Dick Stewart relit his pipe and lay back: not too close to Cochon. Grey interweaving smoke began to surround him, cradle him, and uphold him as if it had been woven into a hammock. Presently the musing eyes and head nodded forward; the pipe began to hang slack; then it loosed itself from the parted lips; finally, it slid down to the sod and lay there cooling, its brief pennon of smoke blown aside by the first stir of evening. Dick Stewart, too, had dropt asleep.

IX

THE stir of evening strengthened, and the green tapestry of the wood, as it shook with the stir, became intershot by early sunset gold. Butterflies began to settle for sleep; with slippery rustle and thud a chestnut fell; a rested bird awoke from siesta, believed itself alone, and began to sing with all its heart; but Dick Stewart and Cochon slept on. Then a squirrel passed from bough to bough; crickets clicked, a woodpecker tap-tapped; with slippery rustle and thud more chestnuts fell: a loud lark went piercing up into the blue. But still the sleepers slept on.

And now up the sylvan footpath came lazily another wayfarer, as if he too would couch and sleep in the wood. A proper vagabond this, in a shiny and ragged blouse; the tramp and casual slinker confessed, to even the least detective eye; though, for a fellow of that kidney, strangely clean. Let me describe him, for in this quest and drama he will play a part.

Against the sun-bronzed leaves of the hanging branches, his face, seen in silhouette, shows hawklike; astonishingly bright and cynically winking eyes shoot glances right and left of the sharp nose that seems scenting for prey. And notice that upon the bridge of his nose appears a bluish cross, small but odiously visible; odiously so because, for one thing, it puts the fellow out of keeping with the wood. That cross suggests the tattooed sailor, but the fellow's complexion bears no traces of salty buffets of gale and wave: the skin is sallow and powdery, the lines of the face have a dark deepness, as if a graver had etched them and acids had bitten them in. Nothing of the sailor's swing in the fellow's gait, moreover; nor yet, indeed, of the "turn-pike sailor's" shiftily sorefooted crawl. A youngish fellow

this, and agile, who does not seem in the least to need the aid of the alpenstock-like staff he carries. And he has hardly the look and expression of face and eye of the real don't-care tramp, happy and good-humoured with his little, and not knowing or wanting better things than he has. Perhaps he may not be what he seems, this fellow, after all.

He reached the couch of moss and stood brightly looking down upon the sleepers; first at Dick Stewart, and then, with a lift of the eyebrows, at the little pig; the tramp's twinkling eyes were smiling, as if they had found the prey they had sought for, though the prey could hardly be Cochon, one would think. The stem of Dick Stewart's tobacco-pipe lay resting against his slightly heaving shoulder; it was the silver-mounted stem of a very desirable pipe indeed, but the tramp did not stoop for it, to pocket it and slink on, as an ordinary thieving vagabond would have done. There was also the gleam of silver at the mouth of the sleeper's prostrate pocket, where a five-franc piece was slipping out; but the tramp did not pounce on that bit of booty. What he did stoop for, with an agile diving-like movement and swift recovery, was the photograph and the newspaper—the *Phare de la Loire*—which lay fluttering on the moss.

This was a lettered tramp, who could read, and read easily. Swiftly his eyes hawked through the sheet, noting its date and specially examining the marked column. Then the thin brown hands folded the newspaper again, let it fall, dropped the photograph near it, thrust the spike of the alpenstock-like staff into the soil, left it to stand alone there, and pushed themselves deep into a pair of ragged pockets; and then the fellow began to pace up and down a part of the footpath noiselessly, pausing in thought at each turn. Every now and again he stared at Dick Stewart, as if to wonder at this tramping Englishman, companion and friend of a pig. Every now and then he winked, and as there was nobody to receive and enjoy his wink with him, he seemed to be winking at himself.

Then presently, plucking the staff out of its socket in the sod, and going aside with it to a sufficient distance,

this remarkable vagabond stretched it out at arm's length till its spike was poised just above Dick Stewart's right foot ; then with a short deft stroke, as adroit in its way as a golfer's putt or the flick of a coachman's whip at a fly, he smartly struck the sleeper's ankle, and as smartly recovered the staff to his own side. One blow only ; but a masterly hit, that sufficed.

The next instant Cochon was squealing and scampering away, the white silk bandage gleaming like the helmet of Navarre in the wrong place, out of the forefront of the fray ; for Dick Stewart was angrily sitting up, wide awake all of a sudden, loudly ejaculating, irefully astounded, and (like the curfew) "swinging slow with sullen roar ;" agonizingly gyrating, his body swaying round and his hurt foot held in the air, the ankle clutched between both hands to still this abrupt, intolerable, and inexplicable pain. The absurdest posture for a hero, I know, but so it was, and I cannot help it ; that characters in stories *will* do the most erratic and undignified things, in spite of your own wishes, every novelist sorrowfully knows. Happily, however, though you may feel the incongruity, Stewart did not ; he was never a hero to himself.

Inexplicable by the sufferer was this sudden pang and burning smart. Though his eyes had opened on the tramp, that agile rascal was then seated at a distance, at least five yards away, and as for the iron-shod staff, its owner was digging with the spike of it, his eyes on his work in the most apparent ignorance that anything had gone amiss in that part of the chestnut wood.

"Truffles," the tramp was saying to himself aloud as he dug—"truffles for pigs and men," in an unctuous and amiable voice. "Here's one, a beautiful fine little black sponge for a little black devil's little bath ! . . . Eh, M'sieur ?" He held up the swarthy small vegetable to view ; and then—"Why—why ?" he went on, with the most natural-seeming surprise—"M'sieur uses words ! What is the matter with the M'sieur ? A minute ago the M'sieur was as fast asleep as a priest after dinner, and now ! Is this the way the M'sieur usually wakes up ? Dame, a fine bed-fellow, the M'sieur !"

He grinned, as Dick Stewart threw a groaning word at him. "The M'sieur spins," the sardonic vagabond said. "Like the world! The M'sieur and the world go round." Then a look of seeming comprehension came upon his face. "Ah, mon dien! ah, pardon! I am stupid, I am dull to understand! M'sieur is suffering really?" He got up hastily, dropping the truffle and the staff, and came forward with deprecatory, dangling hands.

"M'sieur really suffers? . . . Ah, the M'sieur will have caught a beautiful fine cramp in his toes! With sleeping on moss. Along with the clever little pork from the Langouste. Dame, yes!" said the tramp with the unctuous voice.

Beamingly he looked down on Dick Stewart, who also was saying, "Dame!" but in the English language. The thing was so sudden, so strange, so inexplicable, that he said the word with a right wicked good will.

"Yah,—moss!" The chemineau kept a solemn face of pity. "Never do I sleep on moss, I . . . Moss is the Bon Dien's favourite—always the Bon Dieu waters the moss, with a fine beautiful can. Up in the sky at night." His voice had dropped, and was almost imperceptible.

"Yah. That is why the moss gives the cramp."

"Bosh!" said Dick Stewart, groaning.

"Or perhaps the M'sieur suffers from gout. . . . Yes, it will be gout. The gout is not gay, M'sieur—not as gay as the fine beautiful wine? . . . No? Not gout? Perhaps M'sieur has been eating wrong mushrooms? Bad mushrooms fly always to the feet. . . . Though it may be M'sieur has hurt his foot with walking? Yah! it will be that, M'sieur will find himself lame one of these fine mornings, M'sieur is not accustomed to much walk, like me."

Dick Stewart released his ankle and ceased to sway and spin; the immediate keenness of the pain was gone.

"No, I don't much walk," he growled. "Not when I'm in my senses. When I'm in my senses I ride. But . . . I can't think how on earth—" He glanced at the long staff with suspicion.

"The M'sieur is not in his senses to-day?" the chemineau inquired blandly.

"Not by a long chalk,—but hold your tongue! Ough!"

The pain was recurring. Yet in the midst of it he could think of the pig. "Where's Cochon?" he muttered, looking round.

"The fine beautiful little pork will have gone to the Langouste," said the chemineau; "to get his sup of wine. Dame, yes, he drinks his wine, I have seen him, the rascal! Once he got too much, and then how he was droll!"

But Stewart was hardly listening, he was loosening the bootlace; his foot must be swelling, surely? . . . No, he had better not take the boot off, he reflected: there would be the getting it on again. He perspired.

Perspiringly he leaned back, resting on his left elbow and lifting his right ankle away from contact with the ground. He looked at the big staff again suspiciously.

"Very queer thing, my waking up lame like this! Extraordinary affair—both the pig and myself?"

"A devil's wood, this," said the chemineau. "Devils eat pig."

"It couldn't have been your confounded great stick did it, eh? To me and Cochon as well?"

The chemineau's hands appealed to the sky. "*Me*, M'sieur? Hurt Cochon? I love the little pig like a brother . . . Me and Jawohl attack a M'sieur? . . . Never, never! Would we, Jawohl?" He held up the staff and addressed it. "Jawohl, *did* you hurt the M'sieur? Or the little pork of the Langouste? . . . Jawohl denies it, M'sieur."

"What the deuce do you mean by Jawohl?" Dick Stewart growled. "A bit off at the top, this fellow," he was thinking.

"Jawohl, my companion, M'sieur—Jawohl is the name of my beautiful fine stick."

Stewart eased the posture of his foot. "Jawohl, you call it? Jawohl's a German name."

"Yah!" the chemineau said gutturally. "We come from Alsace."

"Alsace, do you?" Stewart said absently. "And you're sure your beastly big Jawohl didn't touch me, eh?"

The tramp licked the tip of his right forefinger and touched with it the blue cross on the bridge of his nose.

"We swear we didn't, don't we, Jawohl?" he said. "But something else might," he went on, with a show of anxiety. "If the M'sieur will let me look?" He knelt beside the smarting, aching, burning foot, and examined the boot near the ankle. "No," he said, presently, apparent relief in his tone, "no, it wasn't a viper! Though a viper may have stung the little pork. Jawohl often kills vipers, there are so many. But could a viper bite through such beautiful fine leather as M'sieur's? Dame, no! Not the king of the vipers himself couldn't! . . . I saw him once, M'sieur?"

"Saw what?"

"The king of the vipers," said the chemineau, in a tone of awe. "He was as long as Jawohl is, M'sieur! I was afraid of him. I was so afraid that I said my prayers! . . . No, and it isn't nails, M'sieur's boots have not been mended. Ah, if I could have M'sieur's beautiful boots! But M'sieur desires them himself, no doubt. My boots are the better ventilated, but—no, not a viper, nor nails, so it will be cramp. With sleeping on moss. Never do I sleep on moss, now; I am too wise. See, M'sieur, I have hot blood. Because when I was born I was put into water too hot. My blood, it boiled then, and it has been hot always, ever since I was born. Yet I have had the most beautiful fine cramps when I have slept on moss. . . . If the M'sieur would stretch his leg right out, quite straight? Yes, like that! Now the cramp will remove itself. From the beautiful fine leg of M'sieur."

Stewart looked at him suspiciously. "Think so?" He had extended his leg to the utmost. "Haven't got beautiful fine legs," he said. "Quite the reverse. . . . No good trying to flatter me, my man." Then he glowered, and said "Dame!"

"Not better yet, M'sieur?"

"Burns," said Dick Stewart. "Burns like the—the place you'll go to some day, confound you!" Again he was looking suspiciously at Jawohl. "Very queer affair, my man, a pain like this coming all at once!"

"So!" said the tramp, philosophically. "We never know. What is preparing for us. Do I any day know who will be cooking my dinner? . . . See, the M'sieur has dropped his beautiful fine pipe! Also his five-franc piece . . . Also his journal. Also a picture." One by one he was restoring them to their owner. "The M'sieur drops things. In his sleep. The M'sieur should beware. Sleep, it is dangerous. If I could keep awake, never would I go to sleep. Once I was bit out of my sleep by a dog. Whoof, whoof!" He barked. "Like that!"

"Ah!" said Dick Stewart. "Exactly! You lie out, don't you? Anywhere—all over the shop?"

The chemineau nodded. "I own the key of the fields," he said. "Me, I am free of the Inn of the Beautiful Stars. Where the wind doesn't scream to get in at you. Where there's fine beds that you don't have to beat up in the morning. The M'sieur will have noticed how ungrateful it is, when you beat a bed? That has rested you so! Yah!"

"So it is, by-the-by—never occurred to me, that."

"Me, I like not sleeping in beds," the chemineau went on. "Beds are dangerous. The M'sieur will have noticed how many people die in beds?"

"So they do," Stewart said grimly. "Also in jail."

The chemineau seemed to shudder. "Hush, M'sieur—do not mention it, no!"

"You're a casual, aren't you? Pardon me for asking, but I have a reason. You are a chemineau, I mean?"

The chemineau nodded. "But the worst about beds," he said, as if he wished to turn the conversation, "is that people are born in beds. It is very bad to be born, M'sieur."

"Exactly. . . . I suppose you live somewhere, don't you?"

"Doubtless I do, M'sieur. Since I was born. I lived, I am living—how can I not live?"

The chemineau winked.

"Ah!" said Stewart, "you understand what I mean well enough. . . . I suppose you know the country about here pretty well?"

The chemineau nodded.

"Ah!" said Dick Stewart again, reflectively, "you take things as they come, I suppose? And you believe in luck, don't you?"

The chemineau nodded.

"Ah!" said Dick Stewart again, still reflecting. Luck! Did he himself believe in luck any longer? Abruptly and mysteriously this change in his feelings had come: a heavy dull weariness, as if the glow had faded off the landscape. Yet still the stretch of green and grey and purple shimmered before his eyes.

"Tui, tui, tui, little bird! Tui, tui!" The chemineau was looking up into leaves and piping.

"I suppose you don't reason or plan," Dick Stewart said. "You let things happen to you, eh?"

The chemineau nodded.

"Even dogs?"

With vehemence and earnestness the chemineau cursed all dogs.

"Exactly," said Dick Stewart. "I think my foot is a little better. . . . Will you smoke?"

The chemineau caught the flying pouch. "Beautiful fine English tabac!" he said, as he dipped into it.

"Better than coltsfoot, anyhow. . . . By-the-by, they seem to breed a remarkable kind of boy about here."

The chemineau looked blank. "M'sieur says?"

"Match," said Dick Stewart, flinging the matchbox. "Boy doesn't matter." He spoke between the puffs. "Sit down," and the chemineau squatted. Puffing, the two confronted each other gravely in the brown shadow and the silence, like sagamores at a council fire.

X

SILENCE ; slow luxurious inhaling and exhaling ; and ease for the wounded foot awhile. Then, presently, "Just one danger about letting things happen," Dick Stewart said slowly. "Didn't occur to me before. I always think best when I'm smoking. . . . By-the-by, what is your name ?"

The chemineau grinned. "Dame !" he said, "who knows ? But they call me Pied-de-nez ;" and he sketched with his fingers in the air the impudent gesture which goes by that name in France.

"Yes, of course—you're Pied-de-nez ! Yes, I saw you where I lunched, I remember. Didn't recognize you before—pain in my foot, I suppose."

The chemineau went on smoking.

"Very well then, Pied-de-nez, it has occurred to me, as I was saying—that, as an amateur chemineau—you know best, of course, because you are a professional—but as an amateur chemineau it occurs to me that if you let things happen, if you don't get hold of things and manage them—why, naturally, things will get hold of you and manage you. What do you say to that ?"

Pied-de-nez said nothing to it ; he went on smoking.

"As this pain got hold of my foot, do you see ? I mention it because the pain's getting hold again, confound you ! . . . You are quite sure that Jawohl . . . ?"

"*M'sieur !*" Indignantly the chemineau said it, "Jawohl is a democrat, Jawohl is almost a Socialist. Jawohl might attack a capitalist, an automobilist, of the rich, but never a *M'sieur* so poor that he has to walk ! No, by the six-and-thirty thousand candles he wouldn't ! Yah !"

"Oh, come !" said Stewart, "I'm not so poor as all

that!" He cased the position of his foot again. "I own a franc or two."

"The M'sieur owns five," said Pied-de-nez. "I saw them peep out of his pocket. They fell out—I gave them to M'sieur——"

"Yes, I'm richer than you are, I fear, Pied-de-nez. Point of fact I'm a capitalist, almost. I could employ labour. I could employ yours. If you are open to earn a sou?"

The chemineau went on smoking.

"Ten sous for you—twenty—forty! If you'll tell me what I want to know."

Pied-de-nez held out a hand.

"Oh, but—you're like the boy Coco! No, not till you have told me. . . . Come now, you know this neighbourhood well?"

"As my pocket, M'sieur."

"You didn't answer Madame, at the inn. Answer me. I ask you if you know a Château Royal anywhere about here?"

The chemineau's eyes had a satisfied twinkle in them a moment, though he scratched the blue cross on his nose as if in doubt. "A—château—Royal," he said slowly. "A *château Royal*?" Then an idea seemed to strike him. "Yah! a *château* that one time was Royal, perhaps?"

"Exactly!"

The chemineau reflected. Then, with a sudden decision, as if to speak or keep silence had been in doubt, "Yah!" he said. "I do. But certainly yes, I do. Bien sûr!"

"Bien sûr?" The words were echoed doubtfully. "That was what the woman said."

"Which woman, M'sieur?"

"Never mind which woman—point is, which *château*? You are certain you know a *Château Royal* somewhere here? No mistake, now!"

"Pour sûr I do! Often have I begged there! Jawohl knows it fine! It is on the route to——" He paused, and looked cunning.

"On the route to——?"

"Route de Valence," said Pied-de-nez with a grin. "As in the song, M'sieur.

'Sur la route de Valence, de Valence a Dijon,
'Y a une maison.'"

"Come now," said Stewart testily, "no music! And none of your politesse! No saying yes for the sake of it—no Frenchness, if you're an Alsatian! You are certain you know near here a château that was once Royal? Come now, your hand on your conscience—you *do*?"

Pied-de-nez wetted his finger and put it to the cross on his nose.

"You really *do*?" Dick Stewart cried. "A château with a Monsieur living in it—a Monsieur very pompous in his talk?—an English Monsieur, probably—anyhow a Monsieur lately from England?"

"But yes, but yes, of course I do!" the chemineau said positively. "An old Monsieur, a fat one. And foolish. . . . Though not always foolish. Dame, no!—once he gave me a franc."

Dick Stewart took the hint, and a franc went spinning through the air.

"I thank the generous M'sieur," said Pied-de-nez.

"That's earnest money, merely—more where that came from! Now tell me his name!"

"Whose name, M'sieur?"

"The fat gentleman's name, confound you!"

"Dame!" said the chemineau, doubtfully, "who knows? Nobody's certain about that M'sieur's name."

"Doesn't matter much, that, for the present—I know what it is," Dick Stewart said, and the chemineau looked at him keenly. "Point is, where's the château? Anybody else living there? Have you ever been inside the place?"

"Dame, no!" said Pied-de-nez. "They keep it close. Me, I should very much like to get inside that place. To see something. . . . But M'sieur may get inside the château, if he likes. . . . Ah, yes, M'sieur is *fly*!" he said, with sudden exclamation. "Ah, yes, it is that! M'sieur desires to rob it—M'sieur will be a beautiful fine swell burglar from Paris."

"Nothing of the kind, confound you! I couldn't burgle a hen-roost! Do I *look* that kind of fellow? What I want to know is this—does anybody else live there?"

"Yes, certainly!" the chemineau said. "The chaplain—an old-young man."

"I don't mean a man!" Stewart said testily. "Nobody else?"

"Yes, certainly—a Madame!" The chemineau grinned. "Dame, a very strange Madame, a maniac of a Madame. The very drollest of Madames! English, of course. Once she gave me the toe of a broom."

"Good heavens above, yes!" Dick Stewart was up on his feet, disregarding the pain. "By Jove, I believe I've hit it, first try!" He whistled joyfully, and beamed. . . . "Oh, but this is too good to be true, perhaps. I say, Pied-de-nez, are you sure? Because there will be somebody else there too, if Bonne's there. There *is* somebody else, isn't there? If you say there isn't I'll throttle you! There is, isn't there? Somebody sweet and lovely and young?"

"Bien sûr," the chemineau said. "The daughter of the fat M'sieur. . . . Does the generous M'sieur wish to see her?"

"Do I not!" cried Dick Stewart. "You brick of a chemineau, hurray!"

Hurray! He could have shown his joy by song and dance if his ankle would have let him. Luck, sheer right-dance incredible, ineffable luck, to have come upon the trace so soon! "Ah, I was wise to walk—ah, I'd never have happened on this in the car—no, I'd never have seen this fellow!" Gratitude to the vagrant minister of such luck suffused him. "Regardez, mon ami!" he cried happily. "Behold the five-franc piece again!" He sent it spinning high into the air.

The chemineau sprang up, caught the descending coin, bit it, spat upon it, pocketed it, and then stood grave as an image.

"Five francs," he said. "Five francs is half of ten

francs." He looked at the huge coin. "I wish he had a brother."

"He has, by-the-by."

"Where, M'sieur?"

"In my pocket."

The chemineau looked greedy. "Five francs is pay," he said. "But not much pay. What for? What does the highly generous M'sieur require?"

"The name of the château, of course—and the way to it. Quick, I must go there at once!"

"So!" said the chemineau, stolidly. "The name of it and the way to it. . . . But M'sieur must wait a little minute, it is to be a bargain. . . . Ah, here is M'sieur's little pork come back—ah, he hides, but I see his little nose. . . . I say M'sieur's little pork, because M'sieur goes to sleep with him so brotherly. But, in truth, it is not M'sieur's little pork, it is the little truffle-pork of the Langouste."

"Don't jaw so, confound you! Tell me what I asked!"

"Dame, in good time," the chemineau said. "See now, the Highly Generous M'sieur is rich, he has many francs; me, I am poor. The Highly Generous possesses capital; me, I possess labour—me, I am a poor devil of a Socialist, like my Jawohl. Most days I am that, I mean. But this day I possess capital. Capital is what you can sell. My capital is what I know." There was more of ruse than cupidity in his look as he went on. "If I tell what I know my capital is gone. . . . So! The Highly Generous must pay a poor chemineau, to show the way to the château that once was Royal!"

"Of course, of course—don't be so grasping, man," Dick Stewart irritably said. "A louis for you, of course, when we're there. Which is the way? I want to start at once. Up here?" He took a stride. Then he muttered something fiery, for the pain in his foot had grated and burned.

"So!" said the chemineau. "The Highly Generous sees that he cannot go now! It is too far,—it would be too late."

"No, now!" said Stewart, angrily, "I going now, pain or no pain!"

"Then the M'sieur will go alone, the obstinate, the pig-headed one will!" Sulkily the chemineau said that. "Me, I do not go to-night. Me, I like not the dark."

"Dark? It isn't much after six o'clock!" Stewart pulled out his watch, and the chemineau looked at it enviously.

"Gold!" he said. "Well, and what says M'sieur's gold onion?"

"Six twenty-four—not late at all."

"But a long way to go, M'sieur. Ten kilomètres to the château. It is dark early, because it is going to rain. Yah! in an hour the cats will light their green lamps. For the dark."

"There will be a moon, won't there?"

"Dame!" said the chemineau. "Who knows? The moon is a chemineau, like me—she is lazy, often she sleeps. Me, I like not the dark. I am an enfant de minuit, I."

"An infant of midnight? What do you mean?"

"My mother groaned for me at midnight, Highly Generous—twelve o'clock the last night of the year. . . . Infants of midnight see things in the dark. I might see the red devil himself, the Seigneur Rouge."

"Rubbish!" Dick Stewart was stooping to the lace of his right boot, and Pied-de-nez changed his argument. "M'sieur sees well that he is lame. The Highly Generous ought to rest his poor foot. The Highly Generous must dine. And sleep. At the Langouste. In Provençal. Over the hill."

Stewart had straightened himself again, and was trying his foot on the pathway, gingerly. He looked at the bush from which a pink little snout was peeping.

"Viens donc, Cochon, petit Cochon," he said, "you shall show me the way."

"To-morrow it will be fine—to-morrow in the morning we will go, Highly Generous!"

"No; now! Carry my things! Come, then, which way? Uphill? . . . Oh, confound the foot!" He had stopped in his fifth stride, and as he panted a perspiration

broke out on him. "A pretty look-out, this!" he thought and he whistled gloomily. Yet he set his lips again, "Come along—lend me your Jawohl."

But the long staff could help him little, and the chemineau watched the slow upward limping with something like compunction for the pain his deft stroke had caused.

"Tenez donc, if M'sieur will put his hand on my shoulder. So! And bear down hard! . . . Oh, I may be touched, I am ragged but clean. . . . So! . . . Perhaps if the Highly Generous would hop? . . . So! . . . Oh, it is not far to the Lengouste—just over this nothing of a hill! So! The Highly Generous hops bravely! Like a kangaroo."

Dick Stewart groaned. "Confound your impudence!" But presently his testiness passed, and "Consolata, consolata!" he whispered, as with Cochon trotting at his side he hopped and limped uphill.

It was trying work, this lame-duck climbing; but respite came for a while when they stood on the top of the ridge.

"So! It is yonder, the château." Pied-de-nez pointed eastward. "M'sieur sees a forest? Eh bien, beyond that forest is the Château Royal!"

Obscure the distant forest showed, a dark blur against an uneasy sky of grey and purple gloom. Evening had drawn on rapidly and untimely; a gauzy mist, that might have been the dying breath of the day, was rising from the valley, and with it a chill of depression seemed to come. Wanness possessed the scene; a dull still silence held the valley. Sounds there were, below, but sounds that to Stewart's mood brought sadness. Nostalgia in that distant low of oxen, in that far-away chime of cattle-bells; melancholy itself looked down from that high upper sky of unearthly green, pierced by one keen pale star.

Black the forest, hidden the Château; untimely night and unseasonable rain impending; Stewart still was panting with difficult effort and sweat of pain. His hour of depression, that rare and casual experience which came

to him never oftener than once a month, like the nights between the waned and the waxing moon, was on him now ; sudden distaste for his quest, and a dull hopelessness, a weak doubting, were on him. . . .

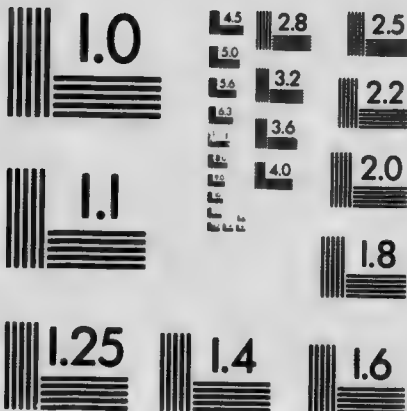
Then, suddenly, he jerked back his face ; a swallow, like a shaftless javelin-head, had cut the air in front of his eyes. The swallow shot vaward, and—

“Allons !” Stewart said. “Pick up my things, man ! Lead the way downhill !”



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XI

AN envelope and a letter : " R. Loxton-Phipps, Esq., M.D., Mortimer St., Londres," is on the envelope, and " Dear old Rory chap," are the letter's opening words.

Dick Stewart is writing, in the little café-salon of the Hotel Langouste at Provenchel, a room so dark and panelled, and so overhung by a beamed ceiling, that it somewhat resembles the 'tween-decks of a brig. He is writing after dinner, while Cochon limps about the room, and rain pours musical, and the spouting tinkles outside. The two lame friends are alone, for the weather prevents the coming of the café-salon's habitual guests, and the room is silent, except for the incessant tic-tac of a clock which hammers the moments away.

" I vanished, old fellow," the letter goes on, " and you've been in a state about me, I dare say ; I haven't written, and you've been using language unfit for publication. But don't be any more of an everlasting idiot than you can help. *I'm* all right, though I've been all wrong. Whatever you've said about me I forgive you—I could forgive anybody to-night, even my friends. I'm in good spirits to-night, and my name is Faldalaldo. Though I've got a puncture somehow, and such a deuce of an ankle that I seem to be scribbling this with my foot.

" It has all come about through Great Turnstile, mind you. Great Turnstile, *Great Turnstile*, do you hear ? You called me the largest size of ass for going to live there, just because I fancied the old-fashioned name of the place. But if I hadn't gone to Great Turnstile I should never——"

Yet really, one must tell the precedent story for him in one's own words and way.

Dick Stewart dwelt in chambers near Great Turnstile, off Holborn ; he kept the Law Terms there, though he was well convinced that the Law Terms would never keep him. Georgian chambers there he had chosen, which through tall and shallow-bayed windows overpeep the garden-square of Lincoln's Inn Fields. And at those windows he spent a good many stray minutes—looking out for arriving briefs, he used to say—though never a brief came looking for him. Luckily, he had inherited the slim but sufficient fortune of his father, so that he could live without the aid of solicitors or clients. And on a certain fated day in the month of May he stood at his window whistling and gazing out. "Take a pair of sparkling eyes" is the name of the air he was whistling, though it was not particularly relevant to his mood, for he was heartfree enough just then. But presently his lips parted widely, and his whistling came to a sudden and discordant end. His own eyes had begun to sparkle, for through the window he had seen what he instantly called "the sweetest girl alive." That was what he thought her to be, and that was what he tried to prove her to be, by a dozen or fourteen lines of description in the letter, which we will not read ; for nobody ever drew even a passable likeness of a flower-like girl in words. It is there that a Lawrence, a Cosway, and a Romney get the best of the best of pensters. Imagine her, for she cannot be described ; there are girls like flowers even yet, and England, above all other countries, is a nose-gay of them, thank Heaven.

But Stewart succeeded better when he went on to describe the old dame who was Beauty's companion, and I will quote this part of his letter. "When I was seven years old or so," he wrote, "somebody gave me the weirdest kind of hummingtop, an old curio of a thing, which purported to resemble a woman, and for a long time I thought really did. An early Victorian woman she was, with a pork-pie hat, a chignon, a tight rosewood bodice, and a mahogany crinoline skirt. The skirt part of her was solid, Rory—I mean that though it was hollow it was boxed in at the bottom, and out of the middle of the disc of wood which boxed the skirt part of her in, the peg of the top came forth, like feet. I

don't know for how many years after that I believed that such was the natural shape of woman, by-the-by; I was not a young anatomist like you. Well now, that is merely to explain. The old girl I saw through the window reminds me of nothing so much as that loved and long-lost top of my boyhood's happy days. A square creature, though, not round; apparently solid all the way down, like the top, but squarely so. At the very roundest, pentagonal; but by the best word I can use to describe her, square, Rory—square!

"So square, old chap, that instead of one peg she appears to need four, one at each corner. Five I ought to say, perhaps, for she pegged along past my window with the aid of the largest kind of ancient umbrella that was ever bought secondhand in Leather Lane; though plainly the weather had made up its mind not to rain a single drop for weeks. Oh, a topping old creature, but how could she spin? To dance with her, Rory—I don't suppose anybody ever did or could, but to dance with her must be something like waltzing round with a chest of drawers! Peg, peg—peg, peg—imagine it, and you'll realize her a little, dull and unimaginative sawbones though you are!

"Armour-plate her with a dolman (I think they call it), all jet or bugles, or whatever the stuff is—anyhow, something black and glassy—clap on her big old head a shiny black bonnet stuck anyhow, with dangling objects like mourning ear-drops in the wrong place, atop—things like sable tears, you know; make her shine blackly, all over most of her, as if she were new coal; give her a reddish old face with black-currant eyes in it and no nose to speak of, but a mighty big kind-looking mouth 'what stretches from here to here'; let her wear stodgy black gloves as if she never wore 'em except at gay and festiveerals—and you've got her, Rory, you've got her! You can have her altogether when I find her again, if you like. For a frightfully decent old girl she is, in spite of her looks, and you really ought to marry, considering your profession! Think about it, dear old chap. Anyhow, she's the guard and companion of the sweetest girl alive. I don't say quite the loveliest, you know, but——"

Dick Stewart poses his aching foot upon his left knee, drops his left hand with a lump of sugar in it to the level of Cochon's snout, lays down the pen, takes the last drops of coffee from his cup, lights another pipe, picks up the pen again, leans back in his chair, and at arm's length writes on. To judge by his attitude he is careless and easy, yet now begins the most earnest part of the whole screed.

"Let me try again to make you see *her*, Rory—I wish to the lord I could see her myself, by-the-by,—but I shall to-morrow. Slight and young, but finished and complete—not beautiful, perhaps, but lovely-sweet. Such eyes, old chap! Violet sapphires, violets crystallized into luminous gems! Eyes as fresh as spring morning—

"Windows of the sky
Through which Aurora shows her brightening face.

"And the curved eyebrows, like two slender wings. You grin, confound you! You wouldn't if you saw them, Rory, steady and pure and proud—I don't mean you are, but her eyes.

"She was dressed in I don't know what, something dark and close and exquisitely neat, nothing fluffy or feathery or fly-away; not *chic*, you must understand—I hate the word, and the thing as well,—but '*très bien mise*.' Just that supreme simplicity which you only get with perfect taste—the guys some women make of themselves, Rory! I expect a really perfect dress is born, not made; though just as every well-dressed man has to be his own tailor, choosing and ordering, and superintending his own fitting-on, so it doesn't much matter what a woman wears, so long as she knows how to wear it and carry it. *She* does, in excelsis. Dressed in something dark, I say, but the loveliest colour in her face, coming and going like her breath; and one intense touch of colour, rose-colour, at her throat, a bow or a ruche or a trecker, or fichu, or whatever they call it, I don't know. But lovely and simple anyhow, a treat for an eye which loves watercolour-drawings, the rich bright touches in the foreground, and the soft low tones that recede. Modern and costly, of course,—Rue de la Paix, and all that, and yet—you know the odd way one gets

impressions—something of the Eighteenth century about her, Rory, a—what shall I call it?—a pastel sort of grace. Perhaps it is because she has that finished but exquisitely modest maintien which convent schools so often give, that she makes me think of old France, my mother's grandmother's France. Yet quite young and bright she is, you know—not at all *too* calm; charmingly young and daintily animated, she talked almost gaily with the old girl—she has a rose-blush of a smile. Now and then, when the old girl said something *too* absurd, she laughed, delightfully laughed. And then, what a flash of the eye, what a swaying bend of her head . . . the turn of her throat! . . . Ah, Rory!

Dick Stewart held out the thin notepaper at arm's length, and, as an artist might do, regarded this sketch of a portrait with dissatisfaction. "No, that's not it," he said, whistling dolefully. "Not it at all! I've muffed it miserably. . . . Doesn't matter much, though—the prosaic old beggar will never understand."

"I'm an ass to be telling you about her at all, I know, but I must tell somebody something, or explode. Five or six weeks of secrecy have been a bit too much for a fellow of my brilliant powers of conversation. I've been going in for talking a lot to-day, but it hasn't relieved me sufficiently yet. I've talked to an imp, to a sensible little woman who keeps an inn, to a mad policeman (fancy that, Rory, to a mad Metropolitan policeman, who is over here, Heaven knows why!), and to a regular brick of a tramp, who's helping me famously. Met 'em all on the road—*on the road*, do you hear? For the most unbelievable thing has happened,—I'm walking, *walking*, mon vieux—I'm tramping, actually I'm a pedestrian, I'm energetic at last, you'll rejoice to know that I'm positively padding the hoof! I've hurt the hoof, by-the-by—but that doesn't much matter—since you're not near to doctor it worse.

"Point is, I find I can actually adore. I'm not good at adoring, I've only done it once before this. First time it happened to me I was only ten years old, and youth is excusable. It happened to me in a parlour—the drawing-room, as they called it—of a jolly old Berkshire manor

farm, where things had remained for twenty years pretty much what they were before wheat-growing began to spell ruin. Place upholstered in rep (don't they call it?) Tinkling lustres on the imitation-marble mantelpiece. Big green carpet roses all over the floor, and antimacassars all over everything else. Longfellow in blue on the loo-table, Tupper in red on the what-not, 'Pickwick' in the original green parts tied together with string in the lumber-room, and 'Wuthering Heights' in a drawer. Miss Emily with the graying ringlets trembling, as she sat at the piano-forte, singing 'But though I listen to thy vo-o-i-o-ice' just as she had done twice a week for years, and Brother William chuntering a pseudo-nigger ballad, 'O my Susanna, won't you marry me?' There, I think that gives you the 'note' and milieu.

"The piano-forte going like fifty or sixty, when enter gentle Miss Somebody Something—I've forgotten her name, but it doesn't matter, and she changed it, alas! Miss Something Somebody, gentle and graceful and sweet and good—yes, good's the word. And in a trice she charms me into adoration. Did she sing? I don't remember. Did she talk much? I forget. But, shy little kid as I was then,—and have remained so, you will acknowledge—I went across the green roses to her, got hold of her hand, held on to it, and while everybody grinned, I begged her not to go away. For she'd said that she must positively go now, she had only come for half an hour, just to say good-bye; and then there was any amount of laughing, you know, as to *why* she couldn't stay, and *why* she had come to say good-bye, and I gleaned that some cheeky grown-up Sixth-form Johnny of a fellow was soon to take her away all alone with him, and monopolize her, to have and hold, for better or worse, and—Rory, the pang c' that to me, kid though I was! The jealous rebellion against it, the knowledge of my weakness against it, the angry sense of powerlessness and hopelessness that I felt! Though of course I hadn't the ghost of an idea, then, what sacrilege marriage may mean.

"Well, the other day, the sweetest girl of a woman alive goes past my window, and in a moment reminds me of my

boyish Berkshire love. Her daughter, you will think. Can't be, dates and ages don't fit the least. She passes my window, lovely-sweet, and with simplicity proud; and I've never been my own man since. Nine or ten weeks ago, that was. It seems nine or ten years. And if I thought that any man was going to take *her* away with him, all alone, to have and hold. . . . Great heavens above, I believe I should slaughter him! . . . Yes, your eyes do not deceive you, that is indeed what I have written, incredible as it will seem to you, who think you know me so well!

"Men are fools to idealize women, I've heard you say in your coldblooded anatomizer's way; women don't understand why men do it, they ridicule us for it, they know that a woman is at best a mere reflection of a man, and so forth. But I *don't* idealize her, Rory—she's ideal to begin with! I've only seen her four times, four consecutive Fridays,—unlucky days, and one of them the thirteenth of the month into the bargain, but—she's so sweet and graceful and gracious, so deliciously a girl and yet so proudly a woman. Not beautiful, perhaps, but the seashell hue of her face, the caressing touch of her little gloved hand to her rich brown hair, the tie of her veil at her chin—so exquisitely feminine, old fellow, and you know I always hated mannish girls. . . ."

Thus Stewart, rapturous with the pen; but no more of that for the moment. In sober prose you shall read how on the second Friday he waited at his window for hours, till he saw the strange pair of companions pass by. They went towards the splay-footed arch which opens under Jacobean houses on the western margin of the Fields, and the woman in jet talked volubly as they went, seeming by her manner to be neither duenna nor equal, servant nor friend precisely, but something of each; watchful, affectionately servile, and querulously but adoringly maternal. Her companion listened, smiled, protested sometimes, and led the way as they went. On the third Friday Dick Stewart descended from his window and followed them discreetly to the arch. He saw them pass into the red-stuccoed old church in the alley; Kingsway shaves the gable of it now.

Waiting under the arch a slow half hour, he saw them return. They did not notice him at first, for the "square woman" was talking busily, and "Oh, Bonne!" in a merry and musical exclamation he heard her companion say. Then something in the hopeless and reverent appeal of his gaze caused the violet sapphires to regard him a moment, and he reddened; but there was no blush, no resentment, no haughtiness even, in the second glance with which "the sweetest girl alive" acknowledged the instinctive lift and gleaming downward sweep of the glossiest of new silk hats.

"I couldn't help it, Rory—cheek and bad form, I know, and all that you like to say of it, but—it's the natural inevitable thing to salute her royally. I was standing reverentially back, as one does in Regent Street or Bond Street when Somebody from the Palace crosses from her carriage to a shop door; and my hat came off before I knew what I was doing.

'O it is she whose sweets do stain
The lily, rose, and violet.'

Quoting Elizabethan lyrics at you again, I am, as usual; but really, Elizabethan lyrics find the only words to describe her. She so sweetly commands, she so winningly claims—I tell you I could have spread my frockcoat for her feet, and so would you. Feet, did I write? She sails, yachtlike! And she flies a queenly flag. She took my salute as quite her due, yet so simply and modestly; no prudery, no minauderie, no asking for admiration or taking offence, all innocence of heart and calm of high breeding. The old girl looked back at me savagely, it is true. . . ."

On the fourth Friday, greatly daring, he followed them into the church. With rash timidity he stole into that old-world fane, hoping to mingle with other worshippers there and gaze unseen. But it was afternoon and the little place was empty, except for its upper congregation of painted saints and the three mortals below.

Silence. Dimmed light. Solemnity, that seemed to fall like a shadow from the altar-lamp. A hallowed quietude. Faint odours of spent incense and guttered

wax. A place of still and secluded worship, with no priest at hand to mechanize the prayers.

Silence, steadfast silence; steady in the sanctuary lamp the faithful little flame. Silence, but for a moan overhead just now—the clock is about to strike the half hour. One stroke, then silence again. Dimness, quiet, an almost heavenly stillness; now and again a blurred hum from the street near by, but ever anew the calm. A pigeon pacing in the patch of sunlight that falls in past the door ajar; but no sound, even there. Reverently Stewart gazes—gazes; a boyish feeling, as if he were a lad again, comes over him; he remembers kneeling in churches like this, his head at the level of his mother's clasped hands. And suddenly he knows that feeling of greater son's love for a mother which man's love for a maid will bring.

A murmur of prayer from the figure near the altar, from the slight proud figure so gracefully bent. She prays alone; on the front bench her companion sits up stiffly, as if rigid with jet. Or perhaps it is the stiffness of protest—a Protestant, she, who "don't hold with" the Roman communion. Within the shadow of the door which opens to the gallery Stewart watches, timidly watches; unseen and unheard, he hopes; afraid that he must be presuming grossly, and yet unwilling to go. . . .

XII

DICK STEWART lays down the pen, and muses. "All that was seven weeks ago, seven weeks come Friday, come to-morrow," he reflects. "Only seven weeks ago. And now——"

A stanza by that great Elizabethan poet Anon., expresses the rest of his thought for him—

"There is a lady sweet and kind,
Was never face so pleased my mind;
I did but see her passing by,
And now I love her till I die."

Seven weeks ago, and now, as if it were of the actual moment, his musing eyes again perceive the brown hollow of the church and the cameo-like profile of the kneeler rapt in prayer. Her ear—her small, close-nestling ear, in shape and hue a shell,—is listening for high guidance; and surely the supernal counsel comes, for light from the upper windows falls in visible benison on her head. He could kneel with her, he could pray with her, prayerless as he has been for years; even the guardian woman yields, the Protestant in her unstiffening, and she rustles her jet, and prepares, so it seems, creeds notwithstanding, to join in the anxiousness and the appeal.

For anxiety there is. The lift of the worshipping eyes appeals to the Figure on the altar. And something is clasped in the trembling small hands, they hold the something votively, as an offering; she has come to that old shrine for a blessing on some relinquishment or resolve. And suddenly to Stewart's quickened mind comes the presentiment that she is kneeling there for the last time, and praying her farewell. . . .

Then stirred in him that yearning to aid and comfort which is the first impulse of love. He must help her, he must cheer her. "I'll speak to her, outside, in the Fields! *I will!*" The doorhandle he was gripping rattled with the firmness of that resolve. It rattled loudly, and the guardian woman looked round with a face of reproach.

She saw him, the face of reproach grew red with anger, and standing up, fiery, she shook her umbrella at this prying, this entering, this audacious and persistent young man. "Impudence!" the woman muttered, nodding her bonnet and shaking its glass pendants, and threatening him with the umbrella. The handle of the umbrella was shaped like a duck's head, and the glass eye of it seemed to glare, greenly jealous. Then the handle was thrust towards the altar, and the kneeler was prodded; slowly the kneeler turned, the guardian woman grumbled something, and the kneeler arose. Quickly, but how perfectly—with what indifference, with what distance in her eyes—she passed down the aisle and out of the church! Ah, the delicate poise of the head, the gliding gait, the hang of the neat, small jacket, the sweep of the unrustling skirt, the loving pat of the little gloved hand on the faithful companion's arm.

Too ashamed of himself to dare to parley for pardon, Stewart in silence and immobility must watch her go. The one face in the world for him is proudly carried past him, and violet sapphire light is rayed on him from eyes "clear shining after rain." Not in confusion, or resentment, or even hauteur, does she pass him, but with such an ignoring, calm regard, that he must droop his head, cannot address her, is held back from following, and remains motionless, dark in the shadow of the gallery door, silent in the silence, disconsolate and alone, defeatedly alone.

"I've been a cad!" he angrily told himself, when thoughts of self began. "A cad!" The word growled itself out in the church like a desecration. "What *have* I been doing?" He, with his birth and breeding, his schooling and culture, his liberal profession, and his taste for art and letters, had been acting like a cad!

He had thrust himself into a girl's presence, at her

prayers! He had followed, pried, and intruded. Not a modest typist or shop-girl in all London but would have resented it, any time, any where. But *she*? And she *he*, at her prayers! "What must she have thought me!" he groaned. "A cad—I've behaved the infernal cad!"

"Kick me as much as you like, Rory," he wrote with swift, thick strokes in his letter of confession. "Put your football boots on, don't spare! *She did not*; she punished me in the worst way, she ignored . . . She went past me like a lovely icicle in the sun, with a smile for her companion, but for me an unseeing look, not even a frown. I'd have preferred a frown."

No, her eyes had not reproached him, he remembered; she had simply passed away, out of his atmosphere, intangibly proud. . . . Where was she now? To what elevation lifted? For none could be too lofty for her. High and inaccessible she had seemed, like the violet-sapphire gentian amidst the virgin snows. . . .

Intensely still the church had been when she was gone, he remembered; as though the old place held its breath in shocked surprise. Yet he had heard and distinguished the buzz of a blue-bottle fly in a window, and the teeth-edging sound of its blundering along the glass. So small are the things that attract the eye and ear in great moments; he remembered hardly anything else of the just-then. Motionless in the silence he must have stood for many minutes. No, he would not follow, he told himself; he must not seem to follow, even; no, he would offend no more. . . .

"I know what old Rory will say to this," he now thought, as he leaned his elbow on the table and his cheek on his hand. "He'll say—hush, Cochon, you little beggar—don't snore, it isn't in keeping!" Affectionately he kicked the little pig, looking down with kindly eyes of amusement, and noting how at each gasp of noisy breath the dangling trotters jerked. . . . "He'll say that no cad ever knows himself to be a cad, so that I couldn't have been one. And I don't suppose I was one very much, after all." He had forgiven himself for all that, long ago, weeks ago; he knew now why and how he had been compelled to

follow and enter and intrude. . . . No, he had not exactly been a cad. But he had been a fool. He had discovered treasure, and then lost it. With pains and pain—he shifted his foot—he was searching for it, now. . . .

When at last he had stirred in the church, he went reverently to the steps of the altar, moved by some romantic thought of touching the spot where she had knelt. And there on the second step he had seen a folded paper lying; a crinkled, pinkish piece of paper, a folded and twisted slip that the delicate hands had clasped as they trembled. The colour and the texture of the paper told him that it had been a telegram.

He pounced upon it. *She* must have let it fall. . . . With what intent?

In shame he dismissed that daring hope. No; *she* would never have let it fall intentionally. The square old woman had rather hurried her out. The telegram had fallen unnoticed and unseen.

What would be its message? It would be news of trouble, he felt sure. That would be why she had held and offered the message votively; that would be why she had prayed for guidance there.

"If I am to help her at all——" he reflected. The paper rustled as he unfolded it. It would show an address, it would help him to see her again, and to ask forgiveness, and right himself a little in her eyes. . . .

He looked at the upper part of the telegram; the message had come from Paris; it was addressed to "Madame R——, 11a Hatton Garden." It was two days old.

Hatton Garden? He had heard of Hatton Garden, of course—everybody has heard of Hatton Garden—but he had never been there. Hatton Garden was known as the jewellers' quarter, or rather the diamond-dealers' quarter: it was somewhere Holborn Viaduct way, only a quarter of an hour or less from the church in which he stood. "I could hurry there in ten minutes!" he thought, with a thrill. Oh, happy fortune, thus to have learned where dwelt "the sweetest girl alive!"

And now he should have refolded the paper ; but his eyes read on. They read the message. It was a strange message, cryptic and enigmatical. "Château Royal now a shrine we await Consolata." That was the message ; no signature, no name of sender ; cunning or secrecy, was that ? . . .

Yet this was hardly a message of woe. Why should any one pray, with tearful eyes uplifted, about a summons such as that ? *Why ?* What right had he to question why, he reflected, and he felt himself intrusive again. He ought not to have read the message, it was caddish to have done so. He reproached himself, and angrily he stamped his way up the paved alley to the arch ; though manners must not ask too much of flesh and blood.

"Château Royal now a shrine we await Consolata." The telegraph-clerks must have stared when they heard that click out. What could it mean ? "Château Royal has now become a shrine, and therefore we await Consolata—that's what I make of it," he mused, as under the arch he paused and puzzled, nothing warning him then of another arch, of another pause beneath an arch. "We ?" Who would "we" be ? And who was Consolata ?

He stood folding and unfolding the strip of pinkish paper. He was making it almost ragged at the folds, and when he noticed that he reddened. Carefully he put the telegram under the flap of his pocket-book. He would take it to his rooms, enclose it in notepaper and envelope, and on the outside write "Returned with the profound apologies of Francis Benedick Stewart." Perhaps his name might cause her to think that he could not usually be a cad. . . .

Château Royal—the telegram summoned a Consolata to a Château Royal. Where *was* this Château Royal, and who would Consolata be ?

Château Royal would be in France, of course, and Consolata would be the sweet name of "the sweetest girl alive." The "square woman" would be Madame R—, to whom the telegram had been addressed. Consolata ; a lovely name, the lovely name of lovely sweetness. "Consolata, Consolata !" He murmured it tenderly, he repeated

it happily. He would go to her now, with the telegram as his passport. That fierce, funny old Madame R—— could hardly refuse him to see her, if he took the telegram back. “Madame R——, 11a Hatton Garden”—ten minutes away—that but for the merest accident he might never have known. O mira le of happy chance!

He could go to Consolata now, he could acknowledge and confess his manifold transgressions, he could beg her to forgive, he could show that he was not a cad at heart.

“Consolata, Consolata!” A strange gladness warmed his heart as out of the shadow of the arch he came into the brightness beyond.

And there he lifted wondering eyes, to gaze about him with new sight, with insight; it was as though he had come into some transmuted, marvellous place. The Fields looked unfamiliar; a new light, a glamour, suffused them; airs of balm and music were stirring the trees of the garden-square, a change had come over all. . . . *Why, he was changed himself!* Something great had happened to him, something deliciously transforming; a pause in his life, and then a new moment, a moment to salute with song and flute and viol had come. Renascence, a new birth into a new world, had happened to him. The time of day sounded from Wren’s nearest spire. Only three o’clock? Impossible! Days seemed to have been packed into an hour.

XIII

HATTON GARDEN was emptying when Stewart entered it at five o'clock that same afternoon. He had to struggle into it against the current, so to speak, for a stream of clerks and artisans and warehousemen was pouring out of it towards omnibuses and railway-trains.

So *this* was Hatton Garden! Anything but garden-like, this sooty-brown, flat, straight-ruled perspective of a street; unfit to be the repository of gems and the treasure-house of bullion. Mean and dingy housing this, for icy diamonds and torrid rubies; for turquoises like flecks of sky, and sapphires like frozen spray of the Mediterranean; above all, for

"The ivory, coral, gold
Of breast, of lips, of hair!"

Consolata in Hatton Garden? In a Hatton Garden ugly and dingy, old and sordid, like a miser hugging riches under rags! And, positively!—next door to Leather Lane!

He had come to Hatton Garden in search of lovely sweetness, and in fancy he had jewelled a tiara there: pearls for clear innocence, heart's bloodstones for proud courage, amethysts for crystal sincerity, and perhaps—perhaps!—emeralds for happy love. The pride of her head beneath it, the swaying carriage of her slender throat! How the gems would shine and burn upon her piled-up auburn

"hair with which Love angles
And beholders' eyes entangles!
To my mind 'tis the most fair
That was ever called hair;
Something lighter than a brown. . . ."

Yes, how they would sparkle and glow! . . . But less brightly than her eyes, her violet-sapphire eyes—less gently than the tear he had seen slip upon the round of her bowed cheek. . . .

A hurrying clerk with his sporting hat very much cocked on one side bumped against him, said "What 'o?" and recalled him to realities. Stewart saw the sweltering street again, the humbly-ugly yellow brick, smoke-stained to a leprous gray, the dusty surfaces, the cracked stucco steps between rusty area-railings, the common doors and door-jambs, the common window-frames livid with peeling old paint—oh, surely *she* did not here dwell? How could a Consolata exist in a place like this! . . . Square old Madame R. might well live here; but not Consolata. Consolata! This was no home for old French grace and young sweet loveliness in one!

Yet the curtains and blinds of No. 11a were clean, and the brass of the old doorplate, letter-box, and bell-pull glittered amazingly, as if in that region of bullion they were anxious to pass for gold. "Mr. Knibbs, Dealer" was engraved on the doorplate. Mr. Knibbs, Dealer! Absurd! Consolata connected with a dealer in anything, even in precious stones! Consolata Knibbs! Impossible, ridiculously incongruous! The two names could never consort.

Mr. *Knibbs*, by-the-by? Ah, yes, the telegraph-clerk at Paris or in London would have made a mistake in the initial letter—"Madame R." ought to have been written "Madame K.," no doubt, when the clicking message was taken down. Yes, of course—R resembled K, in Roman letters. But would they be at all alike in telegraphic symbols? He did not know.

That would be it, however, beyond doubt—the old girl in jet must be Madame Knibbs. Consolata had not seemed to be her daughter, and could not be her daughter; of course she could not. Absurd! how could he ever have thought it, even for a minute? Consolata Knibbs!—Consolata the daughter of a Mr. Knibbs, Dealer! . . . He pulled at the bell.

A jangle sounded somewhere, somewhere down in the basement, and somewhere down there also a dog rapped with a fierce little bark. But there came no other response.

He rapped, and again he rang, and again he heard the distant jangling and barking. Then presently the creaking of old stairs was audible, and the sound of patting paws and heavy soft feet approaching the door.

He had rapped the door ajar, and through the opening the eyes of a sharp little tan-coloured terrier showed twinkling. He could hear a grumbling voice, deep and almost masculine. "D'reckly, d'reckly! A body'd think you was the Lord Mayor an' Sheriffs! . . . Oh, dear, I wonder who'd be a woman, if they could?" There was a wooden clatter somewhere behind the door. "Fetching a body off her work every minute like this—a body'd think there was hours!" The door came open, the terrier yapped, and the square sort of woman appeared.

She held a long broom, with the bristles upward, like a weapon, though her armour of jet was gone. A vast apron surrounded her now, hanging squarely—like the hoiland cover on a portmanteau, Dick Stewart thought; and indeed a luggage-label peeped from the apron pocket to make the simile more complete.

"Good evening, Madame," he said.

The black-currant eyes opened as widely as they could when they saw who it was that stood on the flat at the top of the doorsteps, and "Well, I declare!" the woman exclaimed; but she immediately went on grumbling, in a finely ignoring way. "Fetching a body up seventeen kitchen-steps for nothing! And me with sky-attics that bad I can't bend, that's all. What it, young man? Aren't the milk, are you? Nor the bread? Very well then, we don't want nothing, thank ye—no cats'-ment, cat's dead. No bottles nor cast-offs to sell—no, nor no tracts neither, so you'd better misunderstand that at once. Be off, young man—here Tan, Tan Bonyface!" The terrier had run out. "Come in, Tan Bonyface! I never! That dog, he'd eat anything!" Tan was nibbling at a piece of orange-peel in the gutter.

Dick Stewart called the terrier, and it came to him lickingly. "Tan, Tan—*what* do you call him, Madame?"

"Tan Bonyface is his name," she said. "He's been christened twice. Mr. Arkans christened him Bonyface, but I calls him Tan."

"Exactly!" Dick Stewart smiled, and whenever Dick Stewart smiled good nature seemed to ray out from him contagiously; so that for the moment the square woman had to smile as well. Tan also smiled; he stood wagging his tail and beaming. "Don't you keep him out there, young man," the square woman said. "He'll be right down ill, eating such stuff!"

"Buy him some cats'-meat then, dear Madame," Dick Stewart said.

"All right—I'll take a penn'orth, young man!"

"I don't deal in it, Madame," he said.

"Thought you did," she said. "If it isn't cats'-meat it's bottles, that's all. Or orgin-grinding! It's summat we don't want, I know!" She saw a most admirably-tailored young man of fashion before her while she said that, but imperturbably she kept on. "Supposing as it isn't pounds o' tea which is ail dust and ashes. . . . No good your saying it's coals, because it isn't the weather, nor you don't look to me as if you selled good weight!" Except for a twitch of the large and kindly mouth, she was keeping a stolid face.

"Good heavens above, Madame—what do you mean?" he said rather sternly. "Look!" He held out his card and the telegram. "I wish to see Madame R. or K."

"Which?" The square woman put her hand to her ear. "What d'y'say it is, young man?" She was looking at the card.

"A bit deaf," he thought. "Madame R. or Madame K., if you please!" he said loudly.

"A body's not a deaf-and-dumber, young man, so you needn't shout! Raising the whole Garden like that, as 'll think it's thieves! Not a bit o' good your coming—not a bit, is it, Tan Bonyface? That's all!"

"Are you Madame R. or K.?" he said, with such patience as he could muster.

"And supposing as I are, young man? What about it, that's all?"

"I found a telegram—it is in this envelope. I found it in the church?"

"What church?" she asked.

He stared, with irritation at this superb audacity. "What church?" he echoed. "I am sure you understand which church I mean. I have brought you the telegram." Again he offered it, but she did not put out her hand.

"Take it, won't you?" he said, with the black-currant-like little eyes keen upon him. "I was there, of course—you saw me, you remember."

"You was where, young man? I misremember. Law, d'y'think we'd look at you, if you was? We don't know you from Adams." She said that with a snort.

Dick Stewart looked penitent. "I know I intruded abominably," he said.

Kindly she looked at him for that, but, "You did," she told him. "A reg'lar Poll Pry's what you was, that's all!"

"I am very sorry," he said. "I fear I intrude again. But, Madame, when I read the telegram——"

"No business to!" she snapped. "It wasn't yours!"

"Madame, I know it was not," he said humbly. "But when I found it I . . . of course I guessed you would be Madame R."

"Then I'll thank you just to guess as I'm not, that's all," she snapped. "I'm not am I, Tan Bonyface, little Tan?"

"Madame K. then—Madame Knibbs, perhaps?"

"Not Madame anything, young man. I'm a single woman, thank Evans! Bonne's what *I* am—leastways I was christened Jane Maria Jennings, but Bonne's what they calls me, that's all!"

"Then——?"

"And you had the impudence to think I was Madame Knibbs?" she went on, with a kind of horror. "Well, I declare! You don't know what you're talking about, young man!"

He stood in discomfiture a moment. Then, "May I

see Miss Knibbs?" he said. "Perhaps Miss Knibbs will be so kind as to see me a minute?"

"Isn't no Miss Knibbs, young man."

"But surely," he pleaded, "the very sweet young lady I saw in the church?"

Bonne gazed at him kindly, almost pityingly, as she said, "Madame R. her was—that's all!"

XIV

HE flushed. "I don't believe it, Madame—I won't believe it, I *can't*! . . . No, not by a long chalk I won't!" he muttered. He was thinking of a pair of candid eyes, eyes of unconscious unreserve, immaculately frank.

"Don't you 'Madam' me no more, young man, so there now!" Bonne said sharply. "Didn't I tell you I'm a single woman? Always was and always means to be, till I'm superanimated on the shelf!" Then she softened. "Now just you go away quiet and respectable. It's no go, young man! Not a bit o' good your keeping on standing there like a trashedy, that's all!"

"Like a—good heavens above, like a *what*?"

"A trashedy, I said—must be deaf yourself, young man. Law, you knows what a trashedy is, don't you? Never see one? You should. Better nor them silly music-plays, all stockings, as you goes to, I expect!" Then "Go away, sir!" she went on, using a friendly and even a confiding tone. "Madame R. *her* is, so that settles it, don't it? No good you coming after a Madame, is it? You don't expect her'd look at you, do you, young man?"

Incredulously he listened, recalling the view of maiden eyes and inaccessible sweetness, sacred in the church.

"Impossible!" he muttered. "She *can't* be married! I don't believe it, whatever you may say!"

"Don't you, sir?" she said enigmatically. "Tan, Tan Bonyface, leave off licking the gentleman's boots! . . . Go away now, sir, please—that's all! Law, I don't mean to say as you aren't a very nice good-looking stylish-appearing young gentleman and all that, though your hair is a bit too mehogany for some tastes, but there's no accounting, and you never knows. Tan Bonyface likes you, and he's rather

particular, and I don't mean to say as I don't like you pretty well for a begining myself, 'specially for sticking to it when you'd begun. Sticking to it's old English, and there's maybe too much foreignness and Roaming Cath'lickness about for *me*, that's all! Only it isn't a bit o' good you sticking to it now, sir, so you'd better mistake my word for it at once! It's no good, not if it was ever so, and that's the word of a woman as might ha' been your mother, and almost wishes her was!"

"My mother. . . ." He paused. His mother was 'enskied and sainted," and Bonne saw that thought come into his eyes.

"You had a good 'un, sir," she said gently, "I can see that! And her had a good son!"

"Hush!" he whispered.

Never did he think of his mother now, and he thought of her daily, without seeming to know and understand her better than he did while she was with him in this mortal life. Each time he thought of her he saw again, not the calm dead face and praying hands of her last repose, but the quick bright gracious being that she had been in his boyhood, bright with the gay good sense of a Frenchwoman: and each time he thought of her some little forgotten thing renewed itself in his remembrance, so that he seemed to know her better now than even during his daily presence with her he had done, in his fatherless youth. To him she still seemed to live, and—

"My mother would have helped me in this," he said mournfully. "You would have yielded to her, Miss Bonne—everybody did. . . . Please, Miss Bonne—please, *pleuse*, Miss Jennings, do!" he pleaded. "*Do* let me see your young madame a minute, dear Miss Bonne! Take my card to her—perhaps she—"

"No use, sir," said Bonne. "Not a bit o' good. Her wouldn't. Her wouldn't dream on it; her mustn't! You're a young gentleman as loved his good mother, and 'ud make a good husband I dare say, but there's different stations, sir—and I'm not mismeaning railways when I says that. No, sir, I know'd what the end of it 'ud be from the very beginning, and Providence knows it isn't half over yet,

that's all! You see, sir, you don't know, and you mustn't, though you couldn't, because it's a secret, and what'll become of it's more nor I can tell, though I shouldn't if I could, so there! Just you go away nice and quiet, and give it up, sir. Law, I knows what love is. You don't think as I haven't had my proper feelings and all that, do you? And it won't be no good you're going to that Roaming Cath'lick Church no more, that's all! . . . Law, you go to church with some'dy else, what's ready and willing, as there's thousands about as would! Shouldn't mind having you myself," she grinned. "if you'd ask me, which you won't, so it's no go for poor old Bonne neither, that's all." The big mouth spread itself into a kindly smile. "By-by, young gentleman. Tan Bonyface, come here!" The dog ran in and the door was slammed.

A minute he stood in defeat and confusion; then he hammered at the door and tore at the bell. Tan Bonyface barked, but there was no other response. Angrily the bell was rung again, but its echoes died away, and No. 11a, Hatton Garden stood as mute and passive as a house of the dead.

A constable, one of the special watchers of that arid garden of jewels and ingots, came strolling by, hiding the beginnings of suspicion under a blank constabulary air. He stopped.

"Want Mr. Knibbs, sir?" he said. "He's gone away, sir; isn't coming back any more, they tell me. He's giving up."

"Is he, indeed? What is he giving up?"

"Business," said the constable, curtly.

"Oh yes, of course!" Stewart said. "Business. But I'm not here on business," he said. "And I'm not giving up, either," he told himself. Then his fingers went to his pocket. "No offence, officer—shake hands, won't you?" And half a crown passed from hand to hand. "Tell me, officer—there's a *Miss* Knibbs, isn't there?"

"Believe there is, sir—has been lately, anyhow. Didn't used to be, though. Very nice young lady she is, too."

"Yes, isn't she?" said Dick Stewart, earnestly. "I say

though—you saw who came to the door just now, I suppose? *That wasn't Miss Knibbs, was it?*"

The policeman permitted himself to smile. "That was Bonne, that was, sir. Reg'lar scorcher, *she* is. Called me a bluebell once!"

"Exactly. Bonne! What is her proper name? Do you know? I think it must be Mrs. R. something—Richards or Lowlands, or—Roberts, perhaps." He himself smiled a little. "No offence when I say Mrs. Roberts, I trust?"

The policeman permitted himself to grin. "Duuno, sir. Not Mrs. Anything. I b'lieve Bonne's a single woman, sir—says so, anyhow—and looks it too, don't she, sir? Oh ah, reg'lar old maid Bonne is, if ever there was one. Says she wouldn't look at no husband alive. Or dead, I s'pose. Says she always broomed 'em out afore they could say Jack Robinson. Never broomed me out, though. No need. No fear! Too much of a bouncer for me, Bonne is!"

"Ah!" said Dick Stewart. "Thank you, officer." And went meditatively away.

He was back in his chambers near Great Turnstile before he knew it, so absorbed and abstracted in thought had he been on the way. And in his room the question with him still was "Madame R.: Who is Madame R.?"

The sweetest girl alive was Madame R., Bonne had asserted. Married, then—Consolata married! "It's a lie!" he muttered; his soul revolted at the thought.

Love is an act of faith. He loved, he worshipped, and he trusted, even while he questioned, wondered, and worried. "If ever eyes were maiden's eyes," he muttered. Proud eyes they were, that had never veiled themselves; the calm directness, the candid ignorance of their gaze. . . .

He remembered wonderful Italian pictures of the Madonna; a Madonna always motherly, with the Bambino in her arms, and yet—the Sistine picture notably—the raider look in her eyes. Marvellous work of old skill and certain faith; the maiden mother's eyes must be virginal, Italian painters thought.

"I won't believe she's Madame R.!" he told himself

again and again. "I can't let myself believe it; I must not!" For he knew, now; he knew with what incipient hope and purpose he had followed to the church and had gone to Hatton Garden. "I *daren't* believe it," he said aloud.

The worst and the best had befallen him; the worst for selfish ease of mind, the best for heart and soul. That which he had feared from the first had befallen him. Fear of it had warned him not to watch for her, not to follow her, not to seek her. True love often begins in such fear.

Nature had dangled her deadliest lure; he had risen to the unconscious fly and the hook was in his throat; the gulping, urgent feeling there was the dear proof and pain of that. "Love her!" Nature had commanded. "You fitly may. I framed her for you. She is proud and pure and good, and to you love means 'bright thoughts, clean deeds, constancy, fidelity, bounty, generous honesty,' and all things worthy. Love her, seek to companion her, long to cherish her, yearn to embrace her, be anxious to nest and brood.

"For life must be carried on upon its highest plane. Infant men and women must be born of your bliss, to carry Life on in their turn. Look yonder how Hesper, planet of Love, hangs in the sky beyond the Courts, above the river! Night comes, the time of love and dreams. Consider the myriad million stars of night, the bright investiture of the sleeping heavens. 'There's not the smallest orb which thou beholdst,' but cradles its daily brood of young-eyed cherubim; life, new life, life out of life, new life laughing at old death, is the law of all the stars. And loving, mating, fathering, mothering, are the law of life to the utmost selvage of the star-sequestered spread of ether. . . .

"No longer be selfish and sterile. You are no man yet. To be a man in plenitude you must have heard your child's first hoarse outcry. Be man. Light the torch of life. Carry on the torch. Your father was born at my command that children might be born to you."

Thus Nature to Dick Stewart's heart ; but so cunning is Nature that she speaks less plainly than that. She veils the material meaning of her Law, lest love should shudder at itself. A million generations have woven a robe of romantic tissue to clothe the nudity of Nature's rule. What Stewart thought of, longed for, and dreamed of that night was the perfume, the lovely sight, the sweetness of the fleur-de-lys of Love. . . .

XV

At ten o'clock the next morning Hatton Garden saw Dick Stewart again. He had come there to put the matter to the touch. If needs be he would force his way into the house, he told himself. Consolata he would see, Consolata he *would* speak with, and to Consolata he would put the question somehow—"Are you Madame R.? Are you unfree?"

He rang, and the bell brought a smudgy woman, not Bonne, but a stranger, to the door.

"*I dunno!*" she said, in answer to his inquiry. "Miss Bonne? *I dunno*, I'm on'y put in to caretake, y' see. Come in this mornin', I did. The flitters went out last night."

"*What?*"

"No good asking me, sir. . . . Mebbe Mr. Pratt in Tibble's road 'll know?"

Stunned Dick Stewart stood, and seemed to himself the centre of a great silence; though a piano-organ was thumping and roulading near.

"Who is Mr. Pratt?" He hardly knew the sound of his own voice.

"Mr. Pratt th' 'ouse-agent, Tibble's road." . . . Then, "Sakes above! He's mad!" the woman said to herself; she was staring after an abruptly-departing, wildly-hastening, "very nice young gemmun, anyhow, though he did make a 'ole in 'is manners," as she afterwards said.

The very nice young gentleman anyhow came anyhow to Mr. Pratt's in Theobalds Road, a place half shop and half office, with a good deal of new wire blind, new brass rod and new mahogany counter about it, and a window

white with new auction bills. He tore open the door. "Mr. Pratt, fetch Mr. Pratt at once!" he cried to a pimply boy-clerk; and presently Mr. Pratt appeared.

Mr. Pratt was a man with a long nose and an important pair of whiskers.

"About Mr. Knibbs, is it?" he said. "Ah, yes, I know about Mr. Knibbs."

"Tell me all you know about him," Dick Stewart said jerkily. "Very urgent matter indeed!"

"Mr. Knibbs is a diamond-dealer, sir—I mean he was, he's given up now. Quite the gentleman, sir, I assure you—as much as me or you. Only queer thing about him is he shuts his eyes when he talks. I guess he's made his pile and gone to spend it, live! What I mean to do myself some day. Yes, he's got somewhere abroad. No, I don't know where, but I shall in time—I shall be hearing from him soon, about the sticks, you see."

Dick Stewart was irritably pacing up and down the new and smelly oilcloth; everything seemed too new at Mr. Pratt's.

"The sticks?" He irritably stopped.

"Professional word, sir—the furniture, I mean," Mr. Pratt explained. "No, I don't know how long it'll be before I hear from him. His housekeeper I suppose it was brought the keys in last night, and I put a caretaker in this morning—sharp work, sir, but just as I like it—we *are* sharp here, sir, quite smart; none o' your English slowness about this establishment, my word!"

"Ah!" said Stewart. "Exactly! By-the-by, are you an American, Mr. Pratt?"

Mr. Pratt looked flattered. "Only wish I was, sir! But I'm the nextdoor house to it, as you'll have noticed. I'm often taken for one, matter o' fact. Smart of you, sir, noticing that. . . . Perhaps you'd like to hear Mr. Knibbs' own words, sir? I always record my clients' verbal instructions, sharp!"

He jumped to his ledger. "Where is it?—K—Kn—ah, here it is, Knibbs, number K fifteen. Now you shall hear, sir. Isn't another house-agent in London could do for you what I'm going to do. An up-to-dater, I am, if

there ever was one—no flies on me, grass don't grow under *my* hoofs—phonograph and typewriter in my office, superb mechanical piano-player in my drawing-room, electric light all round my garden, motor-car in my stables, telephones all over my highly desirable residence at Hendon, and records all over the shop! . . . K—K fifteen—no, that's K eleven!" He was dipping his fingers into a circular box.

"You see, sir," he went on, speaking quick and staccato, "I'm fin-de-cycle, *I* am. I'm that much fin-de-cycle I only agent flats. Shops and offices—any kind of business place as well, of course, because shops and offices there'll always have to be, modern or no modern—but as for agenting old-fashioned things, houses and villas, no, sir! Flats! I've the most extensive connection in all London with flats! Gorgeous flats, or moderate flats, or cheap ones, I'm not above agenting cheap flats, mind you—a humble flat makes a comfortable home."

"Exactly!" Dick Stewart said. "Be it ever so humble, Mr. Pratt, there's no place like——"

"A flat," said Mr. Pratt, promptly and delightedly. "Smart of you, sir—you'd ought to be American. . . . Ah, here it is, K fifteen, Knibbs—now then, you shall hear his own very words. Know what this is, I presume?"

Mr. Pratt had pulled out of the circular box a thick, black hollow cylinder, and was looking at it admiringly.

"Wonderful, wonderful!" he said. "Science, sir—science is smart!"

Somewhere into the works or vitals—or, so to speak—the bellows of a kind of trumpet he slipped the cylinder, touched a spring with a masterful manner, and then with an expression of rapture stood back to listen, his hand uplifted, as proud as though the name of the inventor of the phonograph was Pratt. . . .

A weird and unpleasant succession of clockwork noises began to be heard, and continued to be heard, in a prelude, interlude, and postlude of whirring, wheezing, and groaning, kept up by the machine as though it suffered from asthma complicated with bronchitis and quinsy. And out of this background of unpleasant noise the aural ghost of a

pompous old voice began to emerge, as if uttered by some diabolical little being hidden at the bottom of the trumpet.

"We wish you to—ah—install some respectable person in charge of our—ah—premises at Hatton Garden, Mr. Pratt—on your usual terms and—ah—commission, immediately, Mr. Pratt. When—ah—we say immediately, we mean immediately you receive—ah—intimation of the date. You will be informed of the date by our—ah—housekeeper, a faithful old vassal, Mr. Pratt. Nothing especial or—ah—excessive in the way of watching is required—ah; simply a respectable person in charge, whom you can—ah—guarantee, Mr. Pratt."

Deferentially Dick Stewart listened; he hated every kind and specimen of talking-machines, big or little, and he called them deadly, but he listened to this phonograph respectfully, because it might be giving forth the ghost of the voice of the father of "the sweetest girl alive."

"Our housekeeper will—ah—relinquish the keys to you, Mr. Pratt, upon receiving our instructions. Property—ah—is never safe in these terrible—ah—democratic times, but there will be no gems or—ah—bullion left on the premises, only the furniture—ah—and the remainder of the lease. As to disposing of these we shall send you our instructions from—ah—from abroad, Mr. Pratt. We are departing to—ah—abroad!"

Then Mr. Pratt delightedly heard the ghost of his own voice emerging from the machine. "You will leave me your address, sir?"

"Our address—ah—abroad—ah—is not at present decided, but we shall write to you, Mr. Pratt. You have been very respectably—ah—recommended to us, Mr. Pratt, as a house-agent, Mr. Pratt, and we—ah—completely rely on you, Mr. Pratt. You comprehend, Mr. Pratt? You entirely—ah—understand?"

"Certainly, sir. Hoping to receive your further orders, sir," said the ghost of Mr. Pratt's voice; and then the machine seemed to purr itself into sleep and silence, and to go away.

"You heard, sir?" Mr. Pratt said gaily, rubbing his hands. "Wonderful, wonderful, isn't it? Progress of

science and all that ! American science, sir—all American, all American. Ah, I'd ought to have been born over yonder myself ! ”

“ Exactly,” said Dick Stewart, curtly. “ I suppose you date your records, don't you ? When did you record Mr. Knibbs ? ”

Mr. Pratt looked at a little label on the cylinder, and “ Twenty-fourth ult., ” he said.

“ Ah, the twenty-fourth ult. ; as you say. Ult. is good —ult. is almost American. . . . And you have not yet heard about the—ah—the sticks—if I may use your professional term, not being a house-agent myself ? ”

“ Not yet, sir. Between ourselves, sir, Mr. Knibbs is a trifle slow. Not American at all, sir. Old-world, as they say, sir—that's what Mr. Knibbs is. But quite the gentleman, quite ! . . . P'raps you would like to leave me your card, sir ! Then I could let you know when I hear from him. No ? Ah, well, anyway, I'm sure I wouldn't be worrying about your money.”

“ I'm not ! ” said Stewart, testily, and went raging away.

He thought he was raging against the vulgarity of vulgar machines in which vulgarity takes a vulgar delight, but presently he knew that he was raging against himself. He thought he raged against the indifference of the people he met in Holborn, people whom talking-machines would naturally delight. Why should the vulgar be going so calmly and happily about their business, while he himself. . . . Surely their business did not matter ! The one thing of importance in the whole world was that Consolata had gone ! And none of the folk he met had a sympathetic look for him, a mute offer of condolence ! Though why should they, indeed ? Did he deserve any sympathy ? Had not his own non-American slowness of brain brought this trouble on him ? “ I ought to have known ! ” he raged. “ Bonne as good as said in so many words that I'd never see them at the church any more ! And the luggage-label hanging out of her apron-pocket—ah, a deaf man, a blind man, a congenital idiot from Earlswood might have known ! “ The telegram, too ! ” he raged. “ Château Royal now a shrine we await Consolata.” We would be Mr. Knibbs—

evidently he always talked of himself as if he were an editor. To Mr. Knibbs at Château Royal Consolata would have gone.

Yet why? Why should she have so gone? Had she not dreaded to go? At the church she had seemed to kneel in a votive act of sacrifice and relinquishment. And next came the thought, "*Why* had she decided to go?" Could it be that "We" did not mean Mr. Knibbs, but a certain hated Monsieur R.?

"No, no, there is no Monsieur R.!" his thoughts cried out. "There can't be, there mustn't be! . . . Or if there is . . .?" Yes, he had heard of partings at the altar. "She may be Madame R., and still——"

"No, not even that!" He would not accept as an hypothesis even that.

Love feeds on mystery—love loves the twilight, daylight is too garish and strong. Mystery, the vague, the half-known, gives a zest to the heart's appetite; not music but mystery is the food of love. And here was a mystery, with a vengeance! Château Royal—Madame R.—Mr. Knibbs, Dealer! That diamond-dealers sometimes mix themselves and their affairs with mysteries is well known. Very sordid mysteries sometimes—intrigues of cunning theft, forgery of stones, replacement of gems by paste. But the sweetest girl alive could have no part in shady affairs like those!

"No, she is being persecuted!" he cried. "We" had summoned her to "Château Royal," and in tears and terror she had gone. She must be rescued, she must be saved. And "Francis Benedick Stewart, you duffer, the duty to rescue her rests on *you*!"

Then, for the first time in earnest came the question, "*Where* is the Château Royal?" and his chess-play with the mystery began. By the very name of it Château Royal must be in France, or Belgium, or the French-speaking cantons of Switzerland, he reasoned. But the telegram had been dispatched from Paris. Therefore, Château Royal would be in France.

But France is wide. France extends for more than two hundred thousand square miles, the Gazetteer told

him. France is nearly twice as big as the British Isles. The area of France is exceeded in Europe by Russia and by Austria only; a Château Royal in France would be a needle in a truss of hay. And "Château Royal" is an address so vague. Château Royal would be Château X, the unknown.

Well, he must hunt for the needle, amidst the countless bents of hay. He must hunt for it carefully and systematically, he must drop his habitual impulsiveness as well as his besetting indolence, he must be wise and cool-headed, for a change. He must go by method—good old method, the mother of science. He must search by method till he came upon Château Royal. And when he found it—

Nay, he would put off thinking what he would do when he found it until found it he had! But, "Suppose she is married?" plagued him then, as it was to plague him every night of his search, the five weeks after.

Anyhow, find her he would, he vowed. Every château in France he would visit, till he found her! He who loves, he who is free to search, he whom youth and leisure and easy means ungate the world for—

"Hath never a fear how far,
For the world it 'longeth to him!"

And now for the end of his letter. "So that's why I'm over here, old Rory," he wrote, in the dim little room at the Langouste, while Cochon snored, and rain poured musical. "Five weeks I've been on my *via amoris* through France, old chap, and I haven't found her yet. But find her I will, and I believe I shall find her to-morrow. If I don't, I shall still keep on. You've no idea what a swotter I've become—you wouldn't know me from Adams now, I'm so fiercely persistent. Do you think I could ever give up in defeat, *now*? No, not by a long chalk, Rory my son!

'Where'er she be,
The not impossible she,
That doth command my heart and me.
Where'er she lie,
Locked up from eye,
In shady leaves of destiny.'

I'll find her, Rory, I'll find her!

"Bodinton—you remember old 'Frenchy' at Winchester? Bodinton has helped me a great deal. Bodinton's got on, he's actually Under-Secretary at the Ministry of the Interior, now—kind of Under-Home Secretary, in fact. I went to him when I got to Paris, and glad I did—the sort of sensible thing you'd never expect me to do. He's quite the same good queer fellow he used to be, nothing sham about his liking to see me again, and he asked after you like a brother,—like a brother-in-law, anyhow. He dined me at Paillard's, did me the tremendous whack—crushed-duck, and the rarest thing in the cellars, and he promised to have a simply topping map marked up for me with all the châteaux that had ever been royal in all France, Alsace-Lorraine as well; I was to call for it the next afternoon. Then he went wide a bit, and talked his beastly politics for half an hour or so. Talked 'em pretty shrewdly, I must allow. No wonder he has got on.

"When a Frenchman *does* take trouble for you, he does. I went to Bodinton next day, and the map was all ready. Rory, old chap, there were forty-two old châteaux marked up on that map—forty-two old châteaux for me to visit, a deuce of a swot. And even that's not all, for while Bodinton was making a kind of *rundreise*, which should touch 'em all with the least possible effort and distance, in comes a Chief of Staff, or something of the kind, very obsequious and apologizing—oh, Frenchy's an enormous official swell now, I can tell you—comes in to say he'd forgotten one of the châteaux, I suppose. But whatever he came to say, he whispered, and Bodinton excused him for it. "Affairs of State, Dick," he said over his shoulder, and grinned.

"Then I heard him say to his Chief of Staff, or whoever it was, "Yes, in the High Limousin, quite right!" And then he turns to me, when we were alone together again, and says, 'I say, old fellow' (he hasn't forgotten his English), 'it seems there's probably another somewhere. But it's not an important château and—I mustn't tell you where it is, and I won't tell you why I mustn't!' And he didn't. Affair of State, he said."

Dick Stewart dropped the pen, suddenly ; a thought had come to him. Affairs of State—Château Royal—the urchin at the quarry—the lad's father an agent—the mention of the great Joseph Leroux. . . .

Uneasily he stared at the paper before him ; the uneasy feeling he had felt when quitting the quarry was now renewed.

"Consolata, Consolata ! What can *you* have to do with an affair of State ? "

"Don't care what it is ! " he said to himself. "All the more need for me to find her and rescue her ! " The pen began to scratch and splutter as with fresh energy he drove it along. "It is precisely that particular château, I expect, which I am to reach to-morrow. Too long to tell you now why I think so, and how I spotted it at last ; more in my next.

"And now, old fellow, how goes it with you ? Killed any more than usual lately ? Nothing worse than the usual mistakes ? I'm always uneasy about you, Rory, M.D., when I think that there are such things as critical relatives and coroners' inquests. I wish you could write and assure me that you haven't been committed for manslaughter in the second degree. But I can't give you a good address to send a letter to, just yet. I'm walking, you see,—I'm a chemineau with no domicile, and my name's Faldalaldo. Elegant name, don't you think ? Suits me, eh ? . . . But selah, and so long, for the present. You're not half so tired of reading this as I am of writing it. Good night."

He crammed the letter into an envelope, folded it, and put it inside a second envelope, sealed the outer flap carefully, impressed the wax with a signet that bore a lion rampant, gules ; and started for the post ; the letter would need an unconscionable lot of stamps, he knew. But when he had reached as far as the outer doorway he had to sit down, for his foot was hurting him acutely. He called a waiter.

"Post this at once ! "

The waiter, a slow fat fellow, demurred. It would be just the same if the letter went in the morning, he said. Besides, the postmistress would be abed. Besides, it was

damp. Besides, he would be wanted in the café. While he talked he fingered a wart on his chin.

Dick Stewart grew testy. "Post it at once, lump! Keep the change!" He put a couple of francs in the waiter's hand, and sitting inside the door-way, watched him ascend the chief street of Provenchel, the Grande Rue.

Though the rain was now past, there was no visible moon, and the sparse stars were hide-and-seeking amidst clouds which hinted that the weather had half a mind to be unpleasant again. Little oil lamps winked at the drenched streets and shone again in puddles: the little oil lamps hung from rusty old brackets that may well have been the very lanterns from which the spies-suspect and aristos were hanged in 1792, when the Terror came to Provenchel. A few guests had now entered the café-salon, but most of the people of Provenchel were abed. "Dull hole," thought Dick Stewart, "better go to bed myself," and he went upstairs, mounting painfully.

As he climbed into the high bed, the voices of card-playing guests in the room beneath him reached his ears.

"I trump the trick? Pan! . . . I lead. Pan! An ace, pan! Another pretty ace!"

He yawned, and shut his ears as well as his eyes. "Confounded nuisance, a foot like this, just now of all times!" he grumbled as he stretched it out, clear of the upper sack of feathers. "Perhaps a good long night. . . . I must rest it for to-morrow. *To-morrow!*"

Presently there was silence in the room below, and all Provenchel slept the deaf and dull slumber of little provincial towns in France. Dick Stewart slept the heavy sleep of an eve—of the eves of great and signal days in one's life, the eve before the Schools, the eve before the poll. Sleep took him brusquely, abolishing in him remembrance, hopes and fears, and pain, at a breath; he slept without a stir, without a dream.

XVI

GLUMLY and sleepily Dick Stewart came downstairs about half-past seven o'clock the next morning ; treading gingerly, for he found that even nine hours of rest had failed to strengthen his ankle completely. But in spite of that, when he came out into sweet air and early light in the front of the hotel he brightened, and the thermometer of his spirits bounded up. For he had come out into a cheery place.

The Hotel Langouste turns a long flat face to the Grand Rue of Provenchel, and has a terrace that stands up like the old-fashioned stock and collars around the chin ; down the chin from the inn door, which is of course the mouth of the face, three reddled steps descend like a protruded tongue. Stewart came out upon this terrace, there to eat, and to watch for Pied-de-nez, and there in an instant he became quite wide awake and cheerful. He whistled gaily. The freshness of summer morning after storm saluted him, the white sky sparkled, the azure shone ; the terrace waved and whispered to him with all its trel-lised vines and fig-trees, and fragrance came to him from oleanders and azaleas that bushed out shadily from paunchy green pots. Those green pots suggested Rebecca at the well, the cupolas of a small old church showed Byzantine on the other side of the street, and when down the Grande Rue came a goatherd piping on a plaintive reed, the milky nannies following, "The Orient !" Dick Stewart thought, and felt that life in the High Limousin was antique and Eastern and good.

A little round table stood up perkily from one end of the sun-bright and shadow-streaked terrace. Upon the table a checkered cloth of white and blue was spread.

Upon the cloth a small basin rested, with a large plate, a dish of little pats of butter like large primroses, a knife, a heavy spoon, and a basket of fresh rolls. The lump of a waiter with a wart on his chin came hurrying, hand in hand with a pair of jugs, in an atmosphere of fragrant steam; a double cascade, of coffee and frothing milk, descended into the basin; and Dick Stewart, already munching a crisp roll with hungry pleasure, smiled his thanks to the waiter and tried not to see the wart.

Simple and wholesome and Virgilian, that first breakfast; pleasant for a man from humid England to recline on that brilliant and floral terrace, eating in the open air, even in the presence of a waiter with a wart. But Stewart had hardly enjoyed to the full the savour of that nectareal *café-au-lait* when he became conscious that he and the waiter were no longer alone there, for a small and skimpy Frenchman had come out upon the terrace, and at the other end of it was beginning to busy himself with oil and rag and sporting-rifle, watched by a dog.

"*Bonjour, M'sieur!*" Dick Stewart was cheerily observing the pleasant custom of general salutation in France.

"*'Jour:*" The Frenchman's observance of the custom seemed cold. An effeminate-looking fellow, with legs too short and neck too long, the Englishman thought him, but "*Fine morning, isn't it? I wish you good sport,*" the Englishman said.

This time the Frenchman did not answer at all; he went on cleaning his gun.

He was a man of indeterminate age, looking anything between twenty-five and forty; with heavy black eyebrows and waxy black moustaches, yet with a head of bristly hair that was iron-grey and, in places, almost white. He had something of a hammer-faced horse's profile, big nose and small, disappearing chin. He was clad for the chase, but clad for it too elaborately: everything about his equipment being overdone. Rings gleamed on the hand that held the rifle; a solar topee, too big and wreathed with too much muslin, and green muslin into the bargain, covered his small head too far down upon his narrow and

peaky face, making its swarthiness seem almost Asiatic ; he might have been preparing to explore the 'Torrid Zone. He was legged to the hips, as if to wade a salmon-river ; a field-glass cased in red morocco leather was slung across his narrow chest ; his game-bag was too capacious, and his cartridge-belt was big enough for a campaign in the Vosges or on the Veldt. "Weird kind of a sportsman, this !" the Englishman thought, regarding him with curiosity that soon degenerated into contempt ; even so did Hogarth stare at the Johnny Crapauds under Calais Gate.

"Squiffy little beggar !" Dick Stewart said to himself. "No sportsman at all, I'll warrant ! . . . Why didn't he answer me second time I spoke ? Is it possible that. . . . Yes, good heavens above, I suppose he positively does !" It had actually crossed the Englishman's mind that the Frenchman might be feeling contempt for himself.

"Thinks himself no end of a fellow, I suppose ?" Over the edge of the lifted bowl of coffee the Englishman was studying the Frenchman again. Yes, there was just a hint of race in the nose, perhaps. . . . Yes, quite a touch of style about the bearing : pride dwelt on the thin bluish lips, and generations of dislike for all Englishmen peered from the close-set eyes. From the left eye only, to be accurate, for the other was kept almost shut, though above it the thick black eyebrow, bushy enough for a moustache, seemed unduly arched, and lifted into an expression of disdain.

The Englishman turned to the waiter suddenly and caught him fondling the wart.

"What's that man call himself, eh ?"

"Sh-h !" the waiter whispered. "It is M'sieur le Comte."

"Count of what ?"

"M'sieur le Comte d'Ou, the brother of the Marquis."

Stewart looked at the Comte's moustaches again ; they were too waxy, too large, too curled, too black. "Dyes 'em," the Englishman thought. Then he looked at the Comte's thin hands ; the rings on the long twisting fingers were too big, and seemed greasily bright. "Boulder !"

Dick Stewart muttered; and then, aloud. "What's he doing here?"

The fat waiter stirred uneasily. "He comes for the chase, M'sieur!"

"Needn't make himself such a howling guy over it! Green satin scarf and ruby pin, shooting! . . . Where's he come from?"

"Sh-h-h! From Paris, of course," the waiter whispered. "M'sieur will get me into trouble, M'sieur le Comte will be offended and complain."

"Rubbish!" Dick Stewart said. "Tell me some more."

"M'sieur le Comte has arrived to shoot. M'sieur le Comte always stops at the Langouste now, when he arrives to shoot." The waiter said that loudly, as if with pride.

"Does, does he!" Dick Stewart was regarding unfavourably the Count's moustaches, with their points pricking out like little horns at right angles with the lips. "He might be decently courteous, anyhow." Dick Stewart was as thin skinned as most of us, and a "cut" would cut him to the bone.

"M. le Comte is proud, of course," the waiter whispered. "Naturally M. le Comte is proud."

"Of what? What's he proud of? Of his birth?" Dick Stewart grinned. "Mon ami—leave that wart alone, will you?—I, I whom you see, simple as I am, and a chemineau—I could give him fits at that!"

"M. le Comte *does* have fits sometimes." The waiter bent over the table, as if to serve the butter, and continued the whispered confidence. "I saw him have a fit, last time he arrived at the Langouste. It was very funny to see—they call it the petit mal."

"Funny, was it?" The Englishman scowled at the waiter. Then he looked at the Count. "Unhealthy little beggar!" Dick Stewart possessed all the distaste of the hale for the sickly, as well as a fine capacity for dislike at first sight. Then he slammed the coffee basin down upon the table. "What on earth is he doing *now*?"

At that moment M. le Comte d'Ou was preparing his

companion for the chase; he was buckling a collar on the dog. The dog was a mongrel of dissolute aspect, and the collar was murderous steel. Spikes a couple of inches long stood out from the metal band, all around it, and "What's he use a thing like that for?" Stewart growled. "Any boars about here?"

"It is to keep other dogs off," the waiter explained.

"What other dogs?"

"The dogs of the farmers, M'sieur—the farmers do not approve of the chase."

"I see." Dick Stewart mused a minute. "Peasant against aristo still, eh? . . . And your aristos still what they used to be. Learned nothing, forgotten nothing. Ignorant and arrogant, and——"

"*Sh—h!*" the waiter said nervously. "He'll hear—I'll lose my place. . . . Though, *ma foi*," he went on, "I like him not myself, the starvation stuck-up do-nothing!"

"Hold your tongue!" Dick Stewart suddenly became the aristo himself. "Did I ask your opinion of that gentleman? I shall beg his pardon for speaking with you about him. Fetch some matches!" He was moving down the terrace as he spoke.

"Insolent bounder!" he was thinking. "I detest the mere look of him—I want his ber-lood! But I must apologize. Cuts me, does he—doesn't answer my polite remarks? I'll *make* him speak. . . . But I must apologize. . . . I want to pull him round this terrace by the ends of his moustaches, but I'll apologize to him first."

He paused in front of the dog. The dog received him in a friendly manner, but the Comte d'Ou called the dog away. Dick Stewart looked at the Comte with a very hostile eye, but "Monsieur, I apologize!" he said.

The Comte was fiddling with his cartridge-belt.

"I apologize for criticizing you to a waiter—it was not his fault."

The Comte went on fiddling with his cartridge-belt.

For a full minute Dick Stewart regarded the Frenchman in silence. Then, "Monsieur, will you sell me this hotel?" the Englishman said.

The Comte looked up.

"Also the Grand Rue? And the old church yonder? How much?" Dick Stewart went on. "A thousand louis? . . . Two?"

The Comte began to splutter in his haste to answer. "What—what—*what*? Sell you the *church*? What do you mean? It isn't mine!"

"Really! Isn't it, really? Forgive me, then," Dick Stewart said with slow suavity. "I quite thought it was, from your lordship's manner! . . . The hotel, then—a thousand louis for the Langouste!"

"A thousand thunders!" said the Comte, pulling his moustaches one after the other. "Sir, what do you mean? Sir, I do not wish to speak with you!"

"I know you don't," Dick Stewart said. "But I'm apologizing, don't you see?"

"Sir, I am not to be worried by you. Sir, I must not be distressed. Go away!" the Comte said feebly.

"But what about selling me the hotel?"

"Sir, I am not an English shopkeeper. What do you take me for? Do you suppose *I* own the hotel?"

"Forgive me," Dick Stewart said again. "Take you for, do you say? I took you for—I really hardly what I took you for! . . . What may you take self for, by-the-by? You give yourself such great that I thought you owned the universe! . . . But I am apologizing. I apologize again. If you don't consider my apology sufficient, well—I don't happen to have a card on me, but my name's Faldalaldo, and I'm walking round about here. Signor Faldalaldo, remember. Bon jour!"

Whistling, he returned to his table; he had apologized, and he had avenged the cut.

So presently, when the confused and confounded Count was gone from the terrace, Stewart sat smoking, idle and content, dropping sugar in Cochon's mouth, and watching for Pied-de-nez. "*That* bounder won't bound again quite so much just yet!" he reflected. . . . "Cochon, I think you'd make a very good little Comte. . . . Strange thing, don't

understand how it is, but I've noticed it often—if you want some of the worst manners extant you must go to some of the titular gentry for it, the lower-class gentry, I mean. . . . Good phrase that, by-the-by—needed coining—the lower upper class! Good, quite good! . . . As for *that* fellow, I expect he's epileptic or something of the kind. Suffers from fits—pride to the head, perhaps. . . .”

The disc of the sun began to show above the cupolas of the church across the way; morning broadened, the terrace grew warmer, the tobacco-smoke rose straighter, the vine and fig and oleander leaves ceased to move. An ox-cart came bumping and creaking up the Grande Rue. The seemingly sullen oxen rolled their blood-shot eyes, and dragged their heavy heads aside, as if to wrench their horns from the clumsy yoke.

“Oxen—the East again,” Dick Stewart thought. “And here, appropriately, is the Eastern beggar himself. Bon jour!”

For Pied-de-nez, who had stolen a lift on the tail of the cart, now dropped to his feet and stood in front of the terrace-steps, his head bent humbly, and his rag of a cap held out for alms. He was singing, in a mendicant's loud nasal drawl—

“ Sur la route de Valence,
De Valence à Dijon
'Y a une maison.”

He stopped his song. “The Highly Generous will now proceed to give poor Pied-de-nez a sou,” he said. “I call the M'sieur the Highly Generous because I know not his own proper honourable name. I *should* say M'sieur—M'sieur?”

“Faldalaldo—I mean, Stewart.”

“So! M'sieur Faldalaldo Stoo-ar. Bon! Then if M'sieur Faldalaldo Stoo-ar will follow the Grande Rue, downhill, till he finds me waiting for him?”

“Why so sly about it, man? Are you too proud to be seen with me? . . . But all right—off you go! Here!” Dick Stewart pitched a coin, with good aim. “Vamoose, Pied-de-nez, I'll follow you.”

Then he called the fat and warty waiter. "My bill, if you please. . . . Now my baggage. . . . Thank you. . . . If you will be so good as to accept this franc for yourself? . . . By-by, Cochon—see you again, Cochon, some day. À tantot, Cochon!" He lifted his hat to the waiter. "Bon jour."

XVII

PEOPLE in the powdery Grande Rue stared hard at the passing stranger, for not once in a year is an Englishman seen at Provenchel. And this was a walking Englishman! No Milord this, but a pedestrian—actually an Englishman who carried a pack!

A corpulent café-keeper, who almost horizontally reclined in the shadow of his own premises, stared over his several chins and his waistcoat at Stewart with some contempt.

"Ma foi!" the café-keeper said to his thin wife who was sweeping the flagstones. "If I was such a fool as to travel out of my country, do you think I would walk? No, indeed, I am too clever for that, I! Eh, Mathilde!"

At the foot and end of the Grande Rue a deep little stream ran swift and sinuous, and under the sunshine of that bright morning it moved like an eel of gold. Upon the grey parapet of the bridge which spans it two brothers of the angle sat fishing, their rapid floats every minute drawn back. Pied-de-nez had paused to watch the fishing, and he fingered the blue cross on his nose while he praised the fishermen aloud. Only such clever ones as they could catch fish from a stream so terribly swift, he told them. He wished *he* could fish like that! Dame, a kilomètre further down stream, where the water didn't waggle so fast, he himself could catch fishes, yah! Himself he had once caught a salmon there, a beautiful fine salmon of fourteen livres. Yah! at the spot a kilomètre further down. Also a sea-fish once—dame, yes, a true sea-fish! Though he would bet his beautifully-ventilated boots that Provenchel was at least sixty leagues distant from the sea. A conger-eel he thought the sea-fish was, though it might have been a halibut, or perhaps a herring! Anyhow, a fine, beautiful monster of

a sea-fish, that could bite—perhaps a shark! And caught by Jawohl and a lucky little line that cost a sou! Alas, he had now lost that wonderful lucky little line—a tyrant of a forest-guard had taken it from him, yah! He, Pied-de-nez, a poor honest chemineau, was now left without any fishing-line at all. Perhaps the rich Messieurs of Provenchel who fished so cleverly in such terrible swift water would present a poor fellow with a fishing-line? Or a sou with which to buy one? No? They would *not*? . . . Very well then, Pied-de-nez would waste no more of his important time with persons so stupid and stingy! Very well then, he would ask elsewhere! Very well then, he could see a fine rich English Milord coming down the Grand Rue—M'sieur Faldalaldo his name was, yah! Englishmen were fools—that was well known, of course—but Englishmen were highly generous. M'sieur Faldalaldo would give him forty sous, in a minute! Forty sous, for forty fishing-lines, and no fuss about it neither! Not like twopenny-ha'penny Messieurs of a dirty little Provenchel who angled from high bridges in too-swift water and could neither catch fish nor give a poor fellow a sou!—Messieurs that were only fit to fish for frogs with bits of red flannel! . . . Oh, very well then, no need to swear at a poor innocent, ignorant chemineau like that! Even if he *had* been born a little bit soft in the head! . . . Oh, very well then, he would go away, he would do what they said, he would pass on! Though the bridge was as much his as theirs, wasn't it? Had *they* built it, had *they* paid for it? . . . Yah, very well then, he would pass on! Dame, he was going, wasn't he? He would walk on and wait for the highly generous English, under the Calvary at the beginning of the forest. . . . Very well then, he *was* going, wasn't he? As fast as he could? No need to use such wicked words, that offended the Bon Dieu, like that! The Messieurs would want more water than that, some fine hot day after they were dead, if they didn't give over using such wicked words! So Pied-de-nez moved on, his shiny black rags illuminated by the sun.

In very slow pursuit of him came Dick Stewart, whose

foot was weakening already. Though he was bravely whistling "Yankee Doodle," that excellent marching tune, his foot was troubling him sorely. He ceased his whistling. "This beastly puncture again!" he groaned. "Can't think how on earth I got it!" If Pied-de-nez had heard he must have grinned.

Grin the chemineau did in fact, as up the slow ascent from the bridge he saw the Highly Generous come haltingly. Lamely Stewart came, and gladly and gratefully he reached the flatness at the top of the hill and the shade of the edge of the forest. There under a tall crucifix of painted wood, that leaned and held out its figure as if to bless the wayfarers, he saw Pied-de-nez sit grinning; as at Chartres an impish gargoyle grimaces beneath the portal cross.

"The Highly Generous hobbles!" said Pied-de-nez. "Yah! the Highly Generous waggles and waddles. So! M'sieur is not in a good temper this morning—the M'sieur uses words! When a M'sieur is in a bad temper he does everything badly. It will be the foot of the Highly Generous again, perhaps! Dame, yes, it is always the foot—never the hand! The Highly Generous will have noticed that, maybe! It is always the feet we put into wetness and nastiness. The hands, no! See now, here's a honest family of ten," he went on, as he looked at his hands. "Father and mother, so"—he joined his thumbs—"and ten fine beautiful infants—no, eight!" He joined the tips of his fingers. "Dame, a most respectable family of mine, M'sieur! And not a thief or a hanged one among 'em!"

"Not so sure of that," Dick Stewart said gruffly, as he stretched his leg out on the grass. Then he sighed. "Pied-de-nez, you queer rascal, I'm afraid it's no go! Dodgy kind of walking I've had to go in for, even as far as here! I positively think I must funk the rest, Pied-de-nez. I'll have to get you to go back to Provenchel and bring me some sort of a conveyance. Think you can? Anything, you know—anything that goes on wheels. . . . Ah!" He propped his hurt ankle on the other. "I'm pretty sure I can't walk another mile to-day."

The chemineau made a show of great solicitude. "So

bad as that, M'sieur? If 'l'sieur would let me rub it, perhaps?"

"No. No, thank you! I'll rest it. While you go for a gig."

Pied-de-nez looked grave. "The lame but obstinate Highly Generous had better go back to the Langouste. And rest till to-morrow."

"Oh no, no need for that, I hope—I mean to get to Château Royal to-day, somehow, mon bon. Get me a gig of some sort—anything,—a louis for any sort of an ambulance, tell them."

Pied-de-nez looked concerned. "But . . . it was my plan that M'sieur should arrive at the château on foot?"

"Plan? *What* plan? Hardly see what you have to do with a plan, my man."

"But . . . M'sieur *cannot* go in a carriage."

"Why not?"

"Dame, the road won't carry a carriage!"

"Bosh! Isn't this the road?"

Stewart was gazing up the forest-flanked highway, a splendid avenue cut like a trench, with green deep vertical banks straight and long. The edges of the woody banks of it were trim and neat and symmetrical; not a branch protruding, hardly a twig out of place, a triumph of meticulous and consummate French forestry. Though straight and long it was an inviting road; mystery seemed to dwell beyond it, and to beckon from the end of it, for beyond the vista of it, seen at the dip of the plateau which it crossed, nothing was visible but sky; the avenue drove straight at the firmament, making a clear gap and opening into the blue.

"I'd like well enough to walk it," Stewart was thinking. . . . "Why don't you answer, confound you! *Isn't* that the road?"

"Dame, it is a road!" said Pied-de-nez. "The road to Angoulême. It is a very fine beautiful road. Only"—he looked cunning—"it isn't the road to the château."

"Then why on earth, you idiot, did you bring me here?"

"It is, however, the place to start from," Pied-de-nez

imperturbably went on. "The Highly Generous will have to cross the forest—tenez, M'sieur perceives the hole in the trees yonder? Ah, well, M'sieur must enter the forest just there. And wheels, can wheels travel in the forest? No, I should think not, no!"

"Then I'll go saddleback," Dick Stewart said. "Go to Provenchel and fetch me a nag."

Pied-de-nez scratched the cross on his nose, thoughtfully.

"Yes," he said, "a nag might travel in the forest. Only . . . at Provenchel all the horses are oxen. Could M'sieur ride on an ox? . . . Oh, how it is annoying! That the Highly Generous cannot walk. . . . I wonder what it was that hurt M'sieur's foot?"

Dick Stewart looked at Jawohl.

Then a bright expression came over the chemineau's face.

"Tenez," he cried, "I have it! Yes, of course! I will get the Highly Generous an ass!"

"No, you won't!" Hastily Stewart cried it. Quixote must not appear at the château as Sancho. John Evelyn the diarist "tooke mules," he remembered, but—a donkey, no!

"Or a wheelbarrow," Pied-de-nez continued, without even the hint of a smile.

Dick Stewart looked down at his foot disgustedly. "How far is it, to walk?"

And Pied-de-nez said, slowly, "Six good kilomètres to Château d'Ou."

"Château *what*?" It was an exclamation.

"Château d'Ou. Dams, yes, Château d'Ou. I say the name bold now, because the Highly Generous cannot get there without me—he couldn't give me the fine slip!"

"Couldn't and wouldn't, you suspicious beggar! But you said Château *d'Ou*! . . . Whose château is it? Not the Comte's, I hope?"

"It used to belong to the Marquis. But it is sold, M'sieur."

"To the Englishman?"

"A kind of Englishman, yah! It was sold to him by the Marquis, through the Comte."

"Then the bounder *does* sell places!" Stewart cried delightedly. "I knew he did—he looked like it! . . . Pied-de-nez, I will tell you something—Pied-de-nez, I dislike the Comte d'On very much."

"Ah, the Highly Generous has seen him? Yes, no doubt,—at the Langouste. M'sieur le Comte will be at the Langouste again?"

"Yes. . . . Where does the Marquis live?"

"But—in Paris, of course!" Pied-de-nez said surprisedly. "Where else? Never does he come to his lands!"

Dick Stewart sat thinking. "Why does the Comte come here if—if the château has been sold?"

"He comes for the chase. Yah! so they would say at the Langouste, didn't they? So! For the chase, yah! Doubtless," said Pied-de-nez, but in a way which seemed to hint that he doubted it very much himself. Then he began to sing.

"Oise. 1 gris,
Couleur de la vie,
Va me chercher un petit mari."

"Eh? What's that? . . . What do you mean?" Dick Stewart demanded.

The chemineau's bright eyes rested on his questioner's. "Dame, what can I know? . . . M'sieur le Comte arranged the sale of the château. M'sieur le Comte is a friend of the M'sieur from England, now. . . . Yah! he comes for the chase, doubtless. But for what chase? . . . A beautiful fine new bird in an old nest."

Stewart glowered? "What do you mean? confound you!"

"Dame, it is very simple—the Comte he is poor and the M'sieur from England he is rich. Very simple it is, the Comte will marry the daughter——"

"What?" Stewart was up on his feet. "That Johnny?" Jealousy is the child of Love, and the keenest dart in the quiver. Worse than a thousand aching ankles was that sudden mental pain.

And it came on the top of physical agony, which the

angry stamp of Stewart's heel had renewed. His thermometer had bounded up that morning, on the terrace; now it fell below zero. Fate does such things as that for us; Fate seems malicious, often. Fate rarely comes to us modern folk in that guise of impassive and implacable event which was the Greek conception of it. Fate waits for our worst hour, and then the sudden leap of trouble upon us suggests the crafty cruelty of a lioness, that profits by the instant when one is least on guard or least fit to withstand attack. Treacherously we are sprung at, by swift claws in a weak hour, in a moment of paralysis from some precedent woe.

Pied-de-nez seemed to be thinking of something like all that. "Did M'sieur the Highly Generous ever see a puppet show?" he asked. "Ah, we are all puppets, with strings! Rich puppets' strings are long, but they get pulled after all, just like pauper puppets. Once I knew a song about that. What was it—where is it in my head, now?" He scratched his head, in several places. "Ah oui,—it is that—yes—

'Les marionnettes font tout, font,
Trois petits tours et puis s'en vont.'

Does the Highly Generous go?"

"*That* bounder!" Dick Stewart was growling. "Good heavens above—*that* fellow have the sweetest girl alive! . . . Here, collar my pack, confound you,—and show the way, quick!" She—*she* to give him her lips, her arms. . . . "Get on, man—stir yourself! Don't stand grinning there!"

XVIII

THEY crossed the road and struck into the leftward stretch of forest. Into the green magic, the quietude and shadow, into the immense calm silence they sank. The maze of bole and branch and leaf surrounded them, hid the world away, and shed an aromatic peace; but peace there was none for Dick Stewart just then.

"The Highly Generous walks better now. M'sieur is excited at something, it drives the limp away, yah!"

"Never mind my foot—tell me about the château, the people at the château. Quick, confound you! What makes you suppose that the Comte——" But he did not heed the reply. "I don't believe it, I won't believe it!" his mind was exclaiming the while. "When Bonne told me the sweetest girl alive was Madame R. I didn't believe it, and I was right—clearly I was right—and I won't let myself believe this now! How can the—the daughter marry him, man?" he growled, to Pied-de-nez. "Isn't she already a Madame?"

"Certainly she is," Pied-de-nez answered promptly and cheerily. "At least, Madame she is called. The ugly angry one with the broom so called her. But then, she might be a widow. Widows marry again sometimes. She might be Madame and still be free to marry M. le Comte d'Ou. No? M'sieur would not accept that she could be a widow? Dame, then, probably she is not. No, certainly she is not! He, Pied-de-nez, a poor chemineau only"—he grinned—"what did he know of widows and marriages? Dame, he would say exactly what the Highly Generous wished him to say. In this strange affair. Yah?"

"Say what you think, man!"

Dame, what did it matter, to a poor chemineau? Why anybody should wish to marry was more than a poor chemineau could understand! But certainly the Comte d'Ou desired very much to marry the beautiful Madame or Mademoiselle. For her beauty, of course. But also for her father's much money.

"What can the father be thinking of? How can he allow such an outrage?" Stewart was saying to himself.

"Monsieur the father is very strange—oh, a very strange one indeed, he! He thinks much of himself—he has a fine big waistcoat, he would not sell himself for a hundred thousand francs, M. de Grandemaison wouldn't. Not he!"

"Monsieur de Grandemaison? Then it can't be the same, he won't be the man I mean!" Dick Stewart cried, almost with relief. "Better not have found the true château yet than have found it and Consolata marry the bounder! . . . Yet it was likely to be the same. Why not? Sweetly proud and nobly simple she had seemed. Consolata de Grandemaison, Consolata de Grandemaison. . . . Yes, that sounded fit and seemly; that was more likely to be her name than Consolata Knibbs! Then the father is a noble, eh?" Stewart said to the listening, watching, and observing companion.

"Dame, yes! Since he lives in a château! But yes, truly a gentilhomme. Anybody can see that. Though fat and porky."

"Why do you suppose he came to live at the château?"

Ah, that was the question, that was, said Pied-de-nez. How should a poor chemineau know that? Even Jawohl couldn't know that! But perhaps it was for the grape-cure. Ah yes, it would be for the grape-cure. The white grapes of the Limousin were medicine, yah! M. de Grandemaison ate the white grapes all the day. Because he was fat, too fat. The white grapes would medicine his fatness. So!

"Is he ill?"

"No, not to say ill," the chemineau answered. "But

doubtless afraid of dying. Because he keeps a priest in the château, to pray for him any minute."

"A chaplain, you mean?"

"Yes, that would be the name of it—a chaplain, yah! The Père Archange. The Père Archange is, it appears, the nephew of the Monsieur."

"How do you know that?"

"Dame! So folks say!"

"But how can they know? If the Grandemaçons have lived at the château a little while only?"

"It is such a peculiar lot," said Pied-de-nez.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Dame! The Highly Generous will find that out for himself. If he enters the M'sieur's household. *Does* the Highly Generous propose to enter the M'sieur's household?" With an air of most innocent-seeming curiosity that query was put.

"Mind your own business!" Dick Stewart snapped: his foot was hurting him again.

"I will," said Pied-de-nez. "I am dumb. Like Jawohl. Though not deaf. The Highly Generous needn't give himself the trouble to roar at me, like lions! . . . Jawohl, mon ami, we will mind our business. Our business is to take the Highly Generous to Château d'On."

"Then do it!" Stewart testily said.

"Only, if the Highly Generous *should* desire to enter the fine beautiful household, there's a way! . . . No? . . . Ah well, though the Highly Generous himself don't desire it there's a M'sieur who does! M'sieur le Comte, he very badly desires to enter it. And naturally, of course. When you can get a rich father-in-law and a belle-mère!"

"That ill-conditioned fellow—the footy little Johnny with a boulder's moustache—that pig!" Dick Stewart was thinking.

"So! I never had a father-in-law, I," Pied-de-nez was saying. "Nor a belle-mère. Though I *may* be unlucky like that, some day—unless I marry a double orphan. But double orphans are scarce, clever men soon snap them up. It is a good *dot* to be a double orphan. . . . Tenez, I read it in my hand"—he regarded his right palm—"I am certain

to be married or drowned. I never go in a boat, and I'm as careful as a cat when I'm fishing. Therefore I shall be married, some day. It will be some day when I am drunk. Though most men get drunk after, not before. . . ."

"Lend me Jawohl, will you?" Stewart groaned.

"M'sieur's foot bad again? Now what did I tell M'sieur! The Highly Generous but foolish is unwise to travel to-day. . . . So! If the Highly Generous leans hard on Jawohl perhaps? . . . So! . . . And if the Highly Generous will try to be gay! We should always be gay—to be gay cures anything. Me, I always try to be gay. When I am not gay I sing. At this moment I am not gay, because of M'sieur's foot. So I will sing." He opened his lips in a perfect bellow of basso.

"Oh, du routier
Le gai metier,
Demi-setier
Lin, lan, lon !

"The Highly Generous does not object to my singing? . . . It does not make his foot worse, no?"

"Not much," Stewart said, resignedly. "Croak away! . . . But give me my own stick again—I'll try both."

"There's a very fine beautiful song which I know sometimes," said Pied-de-nez. "Sometimes I sing it beautiful. But to-day I have forgotten it. Oh, a very gay song indeed, about the funeral of a cobbler who lamed himself with the boots he made for himself, yah! . . . How goes the foot of the Highly Generous now?"

"Bad," said Stewart gloomily. "Like the cobbler's! But get on, get on!"

His very pain made him feverishly anxious to get on—to get on and have done with it, to end the effort, to have done with it as soon as possible and all at one time. No, he would *not* be beaten—not till he had got every ounce out of himself first, at any rate. But he winced, limped, perspired and groaned.

"This, I suppose," he grimly thought, "is what they call 'the glory of going on!'"

They had long been threading the colonnades of the

forest, by paths that were strewn with the tarnished glory of yester-year, through

“Woodways wealthy with leafy gold;”

and it was soft treading, too soft to be comfortable for a pained and yielding ankle. Everywhere around the shining boles arose, sleek and trim, tall and lithe, pillaring a thousand narrow vistas and corridors that, where the sunbeams slipped in among them, ended in a blur of golden green. Mossy peat, embroidered with coppery leaves, glaring crimson and saffron fungi, and the weird flowers of the enchanter's-nightshade, waited for the oncoming feet: around and overhead there were trees, countless trees, ranks and files and échelons of trees, squads and troops and companies of trees, battalions and regiments of trees, an army-corps of trees, that stood at attention or waved salute in endless review. Here and there rose a grandee of the forest—a Field-Marshal, so to speak—soaring out of its green beleaguerment into the blue; lichened on their northern curves, they showed hoary and stately, like the Old Guard; beside them the younger trees seemed subalterns and recruits. And the forest army had its camp-followers, too, for down a broader avenue, half-hidden by a veil of silver birches, could be seen in the southern distance a gipsy van.

“An army that has been in battle,” Stewart thought. For in the clearings the corpses of trees lay prone and naked, stript and despoiled as if the camp-followers had been busy at ghoulish work. And here and there a wounded tree was slipping slowly down, ivy-checked; here and there a sickly sapling leaned upon an oldster, as if shot-smitten in its earliest fight; here, too, and there, dry age stood brown and sapless, lingering on in upright death; the sombre evergreen oaks seemed nuns that nursed and priests that shrived.

But banners and pennons of gay green foliage waved aloft, and shafts of fiery sunlight struck gaily in, to gild the gonfalons of the forest army; while a million leafy voices and a myriad little animal cries cheered it on; so Birnam wood may have marched towards Dunsinane.

Straight drives had been cut through the forest, as if

cannon there had roared and grapeshot cleared a conqueror's path. But the combat now was over ; lull dwelt in the soft gloom, peace and endless armistice had come, fitful lights and cool airs wandered like children down the green arcades. To "foot by branching root and stem" is sheer delight and ravishment in such a place and hour as that ; it would have been the pleasantest walking there that day if one's foot, one's aching, burning, jolting foot—

XIX

"THAT is twenty-seven," Pied-de-nez said suddenly. "Twenty-seven squirrels I have counted, Highly Generous. With tails, and four feet. If the Highly Generous was a squirrel he would have a tail and four feet. One lame foot would not much matter then. You might even lame two, one before and one behind. . . . Why should a man have only two legs? Have chairs? Have asses only two? My faith, no! And why should spiders be so rich in legs? Eh, Highly Generous?"

But Stewart's thoughts had gone on ahead, swifter than squirrels leap, or could leap had they as many legs as a spider.

"*Comtesse d'Ou!* That arrogant little bounder to have and to hold the sweetest girl alive! *That* sickly undersized, ill-mannered, haughty little pup! Some limb of a dead noblesse, some twig of a family-tree as sapless and powdery as the brown trunk yonder, that stands yet, but only just stands!"

Anger rose chokingly—anger against himself. He had wasted time; he had lost four weeks of inestimable irrecoverable opportunity! If he had only possessed the wit, the common nous, the ordinary every-day horse-sense to have understood what had passed in Bodinton's room, under his very nose! Bodinton would know the Comte d'Ou, Bodinton would know all about the pending marriage! Bodinton's clerk had whispered, and Bodinton had said, "Precisely. In the High Linnousin!" or something like that. Then Bodinton had turned. "Excusez, mon vieux—seems there's another, but not very important, and . . . No, I mustn't tell you where, or why I mustn't"—or something to that effect. Plain enough, now, that; it ought to

have been plain at first, even to an ordinary dunderheaded, thick-skulled oaf of a dolt !

"If I'd only come this way four weeks ago ! I might have been in time four weeks ago ! . . . I've been a fool again, of course. No trouble to *me* to be a fool, I'm one by nature ! And not the ordinary common pass-degree kind of fool either, but a distinguished fool, a double-first at it ! . . . Consolata, Consolata ! How could she ; how *can* she ! . . . That puppy, *that* pup !" Thus Stewart shouts to himself, in mental speech ; hobbling on in the very caricature of haste, and chewing the bitter end of thought.

"M'sieur Stoo-ar finds Jawohl a good leg ? Ah then, the Highly Generous will give Jawohl a louis for himself. Because M'sieur is tiring Jawohl. Jawohl is very old. Notice the letters in his poor old head. Magic letters, M'sieur ! Jawohl used to belong to a witch. Many's the time he's carried her to the Sabbat, on the Ballon d'Alsace, yah ! And such a witch ! When they burned her, fourteen toads came out of her mouth, so they say. Jawohl was her pony. . . . If the Highly Generous would try and ride Jawohl, perhaps ? . . . We go so slow. It is late. What time now ? What says the gold onion of M'sieur ?"

"Be silent, man !" groaned Stewart. Beads of sweat were standing on his forehead, he had paled, he wavered, and it was with real concern that Pied-de-nez sprang to his side. "If—if M'sieur will fall down a bit. And rest, yah ! . . . Dame, and let me rub his foot ! . . . There, I loosen the fine beautiful boot ! . . . Ah, but it swells, I shut it up again !" . . .

"Hard luck !" Dick Stewart was thinking. "To puncture just now !" He had risen, and was hobbling onward again, helping himself by clapping the palm of his right hand against successive tree-trunks, thus to remove weight from his foot a little. "I'll do it—I *will* do it !" he groaned to himself ; though for all he knew the château might be miles away yet.

"How far is it now, man ?" presently he growled. It

was near at last. They were approaching the edge of the forest; they were passing out of tree-shadow into blazing daylight. "Now the Highly Generous will halt a little minute," said Pied-de-nez.

They stood in the selva of the forest; they looked across a stretch of brown grass and a dazzling white open road. On the further side of the road a long wall stretched, russet-gray and ivy-hung, buttressed and panelled, above the dry trench of a shallow and narrow moat. Left and right of a tall archway stretched this wall, to corners where round little pavilions marked the angles. The archway was deeply recessed, the walls around it rose to a blunt gable above it; it seemed more of a gate-house than a mere arch. And the outer and inner lines of it framed a glimpse of geraniums and greenness, of sanded drive and grey château. "Behold!" Pied-de-nez said proudly. "I have guided M'sieur cleverly. It is the Château d'Ou!"

Dick Stewart leaned upon Jawohl, and gazed. A grey façade ran deep into the picture which the archway framed—a façade at right angles with the archway, slantingly seen; across the middle ground of the picture the archway cast a broad cool band of shade. Not big and splendid and imposingly magnificent, this château; but noble and stately in its symmetry and design, and quite large enough for a hunting box or nest of love for a Valois king. Grey, calm, ancient, distinguished, and pleasant also; a retreat, a place of peace and rest.

Dick Stewart stirred. "Lend me your shoulder, will you?"

"M'sieur has not paid me my louis," said Pied-de-nez.

"I'll pay you over yonder."

"No, now! M'sieur Stoo-ar will pay me now. I want to go away—I am afraid of the ugly angry one!"

"But I want you to help me to the château, man!"

"The ugly angry one would give me the toe of the broom!"

"Help me across, I tell you!"

"No! I want my louis, now! I shall go away at once!"

"Go to the deuce, then!" Stewart flung down the coin. "Give me the pack . . . here, take your stick, you—you tattooed rascal! . . . You're a heartless fellow, Pied-de-nez!"

"What have I? What can I more?" the chemineau said, with a show of surliness. "I have guided the Highly Generous; I am paid. Though not for Jawohl—M'sieur does not give me a second louis, no? . . . If M'sieur will now go to the château and ask the ugly angry one to let him rest?"

But Stewart had quitted him; Stewart was making across the stubbly hot grass towards the archway; going unaided, going as best he could, hobbling and striving, haggard and wet with the anguish of this final effort, panting, pallid, and faint, strangely faint. "What can be the matter with me!" he wondered. "I have never felt like this before."

The hard roadway gave a kind of ease to his foot after the horrible yielding flop of each step on the dry and slippery grass. It was a broad and hot roadway. He thought he had never crossed one so hot and broad; it burned. . . . But not far now, not so very far now—ten steps more now—nine, eight, seven. . . . At last the grey archway loomed and hung above him, and he stumbled to a place of rest in a hollow of the inner wall. Ah, rest here, shade here, surcease of pain and effort here! He draws up his foot and couches it; the stone bench seems soft. "He is in," says Pied-de-nez to himself, as he watches. "Neatly have I done it. Because I learned how to drive geese when a boy!"

With dim and timorous eyes Dick Stewart gazes through the inner arch. He seems to see the picture of a dream. *Can this be real?* He sees a flowery terrace bright with hues, geraniums burning in stone urns, the red stripes of an awning, the green flow of ivy cascading over the parapet of a terrace wall. Under the awning a table; seated at the table an elderly stout gentleman clad in a loose white suit; on the table a heap of little grapes, the colour of white currants.

Dimly Dick Stewart sees this portly gentleman perceive him, half-rise, and crush in his hand the bunch of grapes which at the moment he holds. An exclamation is heard, the portly gentleman coughs sonorously, in agitation he descends the terrace-steps and approaches the arch.

"I—I'm sorry," Dick Stewart mutters—"you won't mind me resting a little perhaps?"

Then the walls of the archway seem to crash together with a loud clap, and the world to be swinging and swimming round with him, into sickly black night. . . .

"Tronk! Bonne—ah! . . . Archange!" The tall and corpulent old gentleman with the full face, double chin, and large protuberant eyes is fidgetting back along the sanded drive, turning round again, eyeing the swooning figure, fidgetting towards it again, pausing, fidgetting anew, and putting his hand to his mouth and shouting for help. "Tronk, I say! Bonne! . . . Archange!"

Pied-de-nez, watching from the selvaie of the forest, perceives a woman, a priest, and a valet appear, and come hurrying towards the arch, the portly gentleman waving them on, in great excitement and fidgetiness.

"It is somebody English, don't you think, Archange? Gentleman, don't you think, Archange? Can't send him away—can't keep him out, if it is, don't you think, Archange? . . . Maugrebleu, why don't you run for brandy, Bonne! Tronk, where are your wits? That is—ah—excellent, Archange—yes, lay him flat, eh? Quite an English gentleman, don't you think? . . . Ah yes, the brandy! Maugrebleu, why didn't you bring plenty? We shall need some; we are quite upset. . . . Ah, Consolata, this is very sad, we are quite upset!"

Peeping from the edge of the forest, Pied-de-nez saw under the arch the gleam of a white gown, and the shine of fair hair in sunlight.

"What is it, père?" a clear young voice said firmly. "Some one ill?"

A dog barked, a perky yellow terrier came running to the prostrate figure, to lick the prone still hand and make signs of friendship renewed, with nose and tail. "Hus!,"

Tan ! " the sweet voice said. Then there was an anxious silence. . . .

Dick Stewart felt the burn of cognac on his tongue ; he shivered, roused a little, and half-opened his eyes. His eyes saw other eyes, violet sapphire eyes, large with wonder and compassion. He sighed with delight ; then he gasped with new faintness ; then, as darkness received him again, he seemed to hear, as in a whisper, as from far away, a voice which he had heard but once before—

" Oh, Bonne ! do you see ? . . . *Oh, Bonne !* "

XX

"CHILDE ROWLAND to the dark Tower came"; thus Stewart came to Château d'Ou.

"Va pas!" the signpost had cautioned. "Viens pas!" is the defiant old legend graven above the keystone of the outer arch. But, warning upon warning unheeded, he has come.

Pied-de-nez has guided him cunningly. Yes, Château X and Château d'Ou are one and the same. Château d'Ou is the Château Royal of the telegram. Here dwell the pair of strange companions, here shine the violet sapphire eyes. The quest is ended, and action is over for a while. A lamed hero cannot be an active hero, and his time for rest has come.

Now for explanation and unravelling; after that, the drama. But first let us set the stage.

Perceive Château Mysterious. Shaped like the letter I it lies and spreads; low and narrow in the middle, square at the ends, and tall with bulging pavilions. Sunshine floods it, though the "dark tower" of the arch stands sombre and fatal, ivy-black and feudal grey—one of the tombstones of feudalism, and sombre even at high noon. Under that dark old arch a King has ridden in, to the arms of his mignonne. Dead both of them now; long ago dead; one of them was assassinated; dead like their delight, their day, their régime. But still the archway stands, sombre and fatal, ivy-black and feudal grey.

Within and beyond it the château spreads, of warmer and happier colour. Sunshine seems to nest and dwell in the mellow reds and yellows of its lichened walls, in the mossed umber of its roofs where iridescent pigeons preen

and *croo-croo*. See how from the high-clustered chimneys the steep irregular roofs sweep down, to overlap with wide and curving eaves the pavilions and the long façade. Out of the mass the tall white casements and the hooded dormers flash and shimmer, reflecting yellow light from their latticed panes. In fact, the château gleams and glows with brightness and colour; "*Viens pas!*" must surely belong to the archway alone, and not to this pleasant old welcoming house.

For this is a place of welcome; here dwell the hospitality and hoarded peace of more than three hundred years. Under the armorialed portal the high doors stand widely open to light and air, to the buzz of tiny wings and every summer sound incoming. Warmly the time-toned marble of the terrace basks along the southern front; green waves of lawn—almost an English lawn—cast a sparkling foam of hortensias against the cliff-like walls. Cut in the lawn lie three great flower-beds, shaped like fleurs-de-lys; clipt yews stand like gloomy sentinels beside them, but arms of clematis wreath the yews, like a child's embrace upon a soldier's cuirass; and geraniums burn, and sunflowers ray, and holly-hocks rise and stare.

And flowers glitter from the window-sills, English-fashion, gemming the green and russet tracery of the vines and purple climbers which embroider the stately severeness of this Sixteenth-century house. Though age has mellowed its walls and weather has worn their angles, many generations of house-proud owners have kept their château whole and seemly, the summer in and winter out. They have passed, their house remains. Finely proportioned and proudly calm it rests; it lies upon its lawns like a noble old hound asleep in the sun.

But who is the owner now? Who is M. de Grandemaisor, and what secret hides its mysteries here?

Portly and pompous, M. de Grandemaisor sits on his terrace in a lordly way, as if he owned not merely the château, but all France; he puffs himself out; the pouter-pigeons on the roof appear to be mimicking him; he breathes very audibly at times. He holds a bunch of little

grapes in his right hand and plucks at them with his left. *Is* he here for the grape-cure? Can he be "Mr. Knibbs, Dealer," indeed? Nobody looking at him now would guess that so grandiose a M. de Grandemaison, such an aristocrat, a magnate so imposing, can ever have trafficked in Hatton Garden, next door to Leather Lane.

He ever did deal in gems there, his best and dearest, the violet sapphires, are with him here. The château is now their casket: he sees them yonder, and, though he endlessly laments a son, his proud affection smiles. The violet sapphires ray their light upon the garden; they wander, thoughtfully shining; they gleam from a face divinely flushed, for the flush that came at the sight of the stranger in the archway has not departed yet. "Oh, Bonne!" the quickly-breathing lips are saying, even now, "do you really think it is?"

The square woman snorts, and then smiles. "'Course it is, deary—you know it is, my lovely! . . . Tan Bony-face, get down!"

The thoughtful eyes look across the lawn, to where the peacocks strut and sweep.

"I scarcely saw him before, Bonne . . . only twice."

"Law, deary, you know'd him again very first thing, you knows you did, so there now! He's dressed different, that's all. Them Norfick jackets——"

"He . . . he looked very ill, Bonne!"

"So'd you if you'd done what he's did! Found you out an' walked his feet off! He's come, and he would anyhow, if it had been ever so! I told you he would, didn't I, now? I know'd he would, 'cause he's that sort. I'd like anybody to tell me how many other young gents would ha' done it, that's all!"

"Bonne . . . do you suppose he knows anything?"

"He's a college young gent, *he is*," says Bonne.

"I mean . . . anything about my father?"

Bonne snorts again. "How can he, deary? Law, how simple you talks!"

"He . . . he looked very ill, Bonne," Consolata says again.

"Only lamed hisself a bit, it's nothing. Tan, Tan

Bonyface, if you don't get down! And don't you get mis-running the peacocks, d'y' hear? You're always at 'em, you naughty little beast, it makes 'em lose their foliage!"

"Oh, Bonne!" Consolata smiles.

"Well then, plumage or whatever you calls it—Tan, I told you get away!"

"You said he was a steward, Bonne?"

"So he is, deary—it was on his card. Muster Fancy Bendick, Steward, that's who he is. Belongs to a ship."

"Oh, Bonne, no! . . . Don't they have stewards for estates in England?"

"I dunno," says Bonne. "Tan, get down!"

"He ought not to have come, Bonne," Consolata says presently, the clear young voice ringing proud.

"But he has, my beauty, that's all!" Bonne chuckles.

"I told him not, I said it was no go, 'cause there's stations and ranks and things. But he's come, all the same. 'Course he has, he's that keeping-on sort. I knowed he'd come, 'cause he'd read the tallygram."

"He ought not to have read it, Bonne."

"But he did, my deary, and who's misblaming him? Not me. I don't say as I don't like him all the better for it, so there! You left it public, in the church, didn't you? Tan Bonyface, if you *won't* get down!"

A broom is lying on the grass. Bonne picks it up and shakes it at the grinning terrier. "You see me broom that tramp out yesterday, didn't you, Tan Bonyface?"

"Oh, Bonne, did you? Pied-de-nez again?"

Bonne snorts. "I'll Peter Neigh him! Coming and begging time over an' again, my word! And that free with his arm as I never did! An' his fingers up to his nose, that insulting!"

"Oh, Bonne!" Consolata is grave. "Tan Bonyface, come to me!"

Bonne glowers. "I'll Peter Neigh him!" she says again. Then, smoothing down her skirts, she shakes a warning head at terrier Tan. Tan the terrier, ensconced in flowing whiteness, and nothing of him visible but his head, looks solemnly at Bonne.

Bonne's broom lies near her, but her apron is missing, and so is her jet. Bonne is transformed; Hatton Garden would never recognize her now. Bonne is what she calls gorgeous now, gorgeous in apparel. Bonne seems stiffer and squarer than ever, perhaps, but stiff and square with nothing less than shining satin, of a nice rich deep purple, chosen by Bonne as particularly suitable to wear of a hot afternoon in a garden. There is a cap on Bonne's head, it is true; but a cap with feathers nodding on it. A pair of gold ear-drops descend almost to Bonne's shoulders, and a big round golden brooch lies between. Bonne is so gorgeous, indeed, that the rustling purple gown has a train to it, and that is why she keeps telling the terrier to get down.

"Ici, Tan—et tais-toi!" The dog is caught up to a gentle knee and covered with the skirt of a soft white gown. Consolata's head bends over him, her lips touch the white spot on the top of his head. And presently, under its aureole of shining hair so full of colour and light, the girl's face is all one question, as the quickly breathing lips murmur, "Bonne, *why* has he come?"

"Who come? Peter Neigh, you mean?"

"Oh no, Bonne! the—steward."

"Why's he come?" Bonne says gently. "Law, deary, he wants to be tokened to you, that's all!"

"To be what, Bonne?"

"Law, deary, you're that simple! . . . He wants to be your young man!"

The violet sapphires flash annoyance, and "He ought not to have come!" says the proud young voice again.

"But he has, anyhow," says Bonne. "He's found the Shatter. And I hope it's providential, that's all!"

Consolata sets Tan down, and rises: Bonne continues to sit on the grass, very squarely: Tan noses the broom and barks as if at an enemy.

"Hush, Tan! . . . Bonne dear, I do not know what I ought to do. It is so very strange here, Bonne. In the convent I always knew what to do. Mother Agnes-Marie

told me what to do, always. . . . But in the convent there was never anything like this ! ”

Bonne frowns. “ I sh’ hope not, neither ! You and your convints, I’ve no patience with ’em ! They’ve kep’ you that ignorant I never did ! Anybody’d think you was about ten years old, that’s all ! Convints is over, thank ’Evans, an’ I got you again, deary ! ” Then she chuckles. “ We can have our little secrets again, now, can’t we, deary ? We got a new un now, if you like ! Seer don’t know what *we* knows, do he, about that nice young man ! Seer wouldn’t ha’ said, ‘ Take him to the Maison, eh, Arkans ? ’ if he had ! ” Bonne chuckles again, the big kindly mouth grins widely, and the little black-currant like eyes are almost hidden in merry wrinkles. “ Law, deary, men’s got no eyes—*they* don’t never know ! ”

“ I think I ought to tell my father, Bonne. ” Consolata is looking down at the tip of a very small shoe. “ I am sure that I ought to tell him, ” says this maid severe. “ Bonne, I will ! ”

“ Tell who ? . . . Such stuff an’ nonsense ! Don’t you be going an’ doing nothing o’ the kind ! You don’t want the poor young gent turned out at a minute’s notice an’ no character, do you ? ” Bonne snorts. “ Specially when he can’t walk an inch ! You didn’t see his poor foot, or you wouldn’t. And him apologizing for it polite, with his last breath ! Law, it was swelled up as big as a p’liceman’s ! ”

“ Oh, Bonne ! ”

“ He isn’t misdoing no harm here, is he ? It’s natural of him, isn’t it, a-wanting to see you again ? . . . And I don’t hold a bit more with it, mind you, and never shan’t, not with your Conter Doo, as I’ve got no opinion of at all, when all’s said and done ! ”

“ Bonne, you are not to speak of the Comte ! ” Consolata says proudly.

“ I don’t want to speak about him, I don’t mislike him enough to want to, not if it’s ever so ! What Seer can see in him, nor how you can—— ”

“ Bonne ! ” Very proudly indeed the warning is uttered.

"Deary," says Bonne, tears in her eyes, "didn't I nuss you affectionate? Didn't I bring yc^r up with spoons, from nine days old?"

"It does not matter. You are not to speak about the Comte."

"Very well then, I won't!" Bonne says sulkily. "It isn't him, neither, it's the poor young gentleman what's lame as *I'm* talking about, as is worth it, too, for I'm sure he's as nice as couldn't be nicer, so there now! Though a bit gingery-headed I *will* allow, and no use denying it, but a very proper nice young gentleman as ever was, you can see it fust go! Quality, he is—I expect he's a skion, if the truth was known."

"A what, Bonne?"

"Oh, I don't say he's Rile blood," Bonne goes on, rather offendedly. "But you depend on it, he's a skion of nobility and gentry, you mark my words if he isn't, and quite at home in Shatters, very likely got one of his own. Fancy Bendick won't be his real name, it's one o' them eliasies, and he ain't no steward neither, not really. I expect he'll be a peer o' the elm, if all was known!"

"Oh, Bonne!" Consolata's laughter rings like bells.

"And you misgoing and telling Seer about him! As how he's seen you afore and followed and all that! Don't you do nothing of the kind, so there! Getting him turned out immediate, when he can't walk, and faints every minute almost." Bonne snorts. "I'm sure he's good-looking enough for anybody, isn't he? Though not what they calls reg'lar features, and his hair is red, I'll allow, and all over his head. But not carrots or ginger, mind you, deary—more like your poor mother's old mehogany work-box as your father gave her—colour o' that! And him lying ill in the Maison, reg'lar knocked up with looking for you and walking when he was lame! You'd ought to go and talk to him nice, that's what *you* ought. Anybody'd think there was heaps for you to talk to, instead of only that Conter Doo o' yourn, and Mr. Arkans as don't count!"

"*Bonne!*" The flushed young face has paled; that face from which proud honour and purity seem to emanate

like fragrance. The words, "That Conter Doo o' yourn," have paled it. "*Bonne!*"

Bonne knows that she has done it, now. She holds down her face, that has become flushed. Silence hangs around them heavily, and in the silence and the distance they hear M. de Grandemaison's sonorous cough.

"Since you wish it so very much, Bonne, I will not tell M. de Grandemaison," Consolata says icily, after a long pause. "Not while your friend is ill."

Then at the look on Bonne's face she softens, and "Oh, Bonne, he is your friend, isn't he?" she cries, her voice gay with raillery. "You have talked of him so often, haven't you? Yes, Bonne, you know you have! You liked him ever so much the day you spoke to him at the door!"

Bonne snorts.

"And of course he liked you—everybody likes you, when you aren't sulky, dear. Bonne, I believe that is why he has come here, to see you again! Yes, that will be it, that will be it, of course!" She kneels on the grass and takes Bonne by the shoulders. "Look at me, Bonne! Bonne, I believe you are blushing! Yes, Bonne, you are!"

And indeed the square woman is blushing what she calls a "mehogany" red.

"Bonne dear, you *are* very fond of him, aren't you? . . . No, then, I won't,—smile, Bonne! I promise I won't any more. And I shall not tell my father about the—the steward till—till he can walk!"

XXI

LET us leave them to agree on that procrastinating compact ; let us quit them by a path which skirts the lawns and penetrates the charmille.

The charmille ? What is a charmille ? A charmille is a delightful feature of old French woodcraft ; no château pleasaunce in the past but had its charmille ; like its maze, its green tonnelles, its gallant bosquets and its sunk garden, a château must have its charmille.

A charmille is a dapper copse or spinney of hornbeam or yoke-elm, trees of a fine and feathery leaf precisely planted and neatly pruned, so ranked and set in such perfect alignment, bushing out so low and the bushiness so trimly clipped, as to make very noble green walls ; walls tall and deep and close, which flank and shut in and render shadowy and quiet the straight unerring private paths through the charmille.

Let us enter the charmille at Château Royal. The red gravel of the drive crunches under our step for the last time as we pass upon the mossy sod which floors the path between the hornbeams, and we step along silently enough ; yet we step along modestly, as with some sense of intrusion ; for the spirit of a proud and exclusive past seems to dwell in this charmille.

The straight unerring path provides for the eye a pleasant green vista, and at the end of the vista we glimpse a tree-embowered roof. It is the roof of the Maison, to which Bonne referred in the last chapter ; the Maison de Julie, to give it its name in full.

The Maison de Julie stands within a hedge of yew, in the midst of a little garden all flowers ; a little idle garden, where nothing grows for food or medicine or

material use, but all is for beauty and delight. Amidst flowers and floral bushes and feathered canes the Maison stands, like some Paul-and-Virginia hut in a forest; a bower made for love. Here the lover Alain Leu once walked in the uncertain reveries of adolescence, waiting for strophes and rhymes to come, and among the laurel bushes dreaming of what laurel he would win and wear.

Trees overtop the Maison, as if to conceal it from prying eyes; wistaria wreathes it, it is bathed with scintillant light and blue shadow, and out of the greenery it shows coral-white and cool. In the pillared rococo style of its period the Maison, though little bigger than a cottage, boasts a portico. The Maison has been newly lime-washed, to cleanse it alike from weather-stains and luscious memories, within and without. And that was no Vandal act, for the Maison is built, not of freestone or marble, but of wood.

Many years, strange years and troublous years for France, have cast upon the Maison their rain and sunshine, their moonlight and their snow. A hundred and sixty years ago it was built, of hewn beams and planks finely jointed, so that Julie, Marquise d'Ou, might ape a Princesse de Condé and possess within her own demesne a little Cabin of Love. The Maison was built as a rustic temple to Venus, in which a grande dame might shelter romance and refine fierce passion—and might hide or seem to hide her favour for that commoner of Parnassus, the Sieur Alain Loup or Leu.

Approach the Maison more closely, and feel the abiding mystery of the place; upon this brilliant day of year's delight and summer's glory, when everything shines, when the very air is crystalline and scintillant, let us pass into this haunt of twilight memories and scent the perfume of the past still lingering here. It is an odour acrid and mortal, as of ashes, the ashes of the fitful fever and brief zest of life. Dead as dust and ashes is Madame Julie, and dead too is her poet, Alain Leu; all that was mortal of them long ago consumed in the slow flame and simmering heat of the great brown bed of earth. They lie apart, Julie under holy-water-sprinkled flagstones at Limoges,

and her Alain none but his Julie knew where. Short union, long disseverance; for them no more the thrill, the throb, the surging, swift red tide; the hard frost of death came upon all that, a century and a half ago. But still their wraiths, if but in the pale memories of them, own the place; this is still the *Maison de Julie*, even in the mortmain of the grave.

We enter; white columns and panels filleted with faded gold surround us; periwigged people gaze at us with round eyes from round countenances, out of old canvases and tarnished carved-wood frames; a dead and unearthly crew. Look! That faded pastel presents the plump visage, the full form, the voluptuous lips of Madame Julie herself; she is dressed as a stage shepherdess, and her crook is ribboned in black because of her widowhood at the time. Quite a commonplace brown-eyed dame do you think her? Ah, that is the fault of Time and his tooth. For what did Tallemont de Pilar, that arrant chronicler of scandal, write of her? That "her ardour, passion, courage, pride, and her flashing eye and yellow hair, have won her the name of Lionne." Lionne? This simpering Phyllis a lioness? Hush, not so loud with your scorn, lest Alain Leu should hear! Look yonder—that youthful dusky face, tragic already—he died young, and she hid his body—that was Alain Leu.

Light from windows paned in yellow and white shows us all this; broadly the light falls in, to lie in great saffron splashes on the white marble floor. Regard that yellow pane in the bottom row of the southern window—yes, the garden seen through it seems golden, but—read the words. Upon that carved old piece of glass the poet in an hour of ennui or repining scratched the only verse of his which survives.

"A chanter des fameux exploits
J'employerois volontiers ma vie,
Mais je n'ay qu'un filet de voix,
Et ne chante que pour ma Julie."

Dead, all that; but the world is alive, and the age of romance

is not dead. "It never ceases, it does not, if we will think of it, so much as very sensibly decline." Romantic passion still can throb, and love still bless or destroy.

The doors from the portico stand widely back, opening the Maison to summer airs and garden odours, and a grumbling bee comes in. We turn from the yellow pane and the sight of the golden garden; the buzz of the grumble has ceased, the bee is climbing a crucifix which stands on a table in the middle of the floor. A crucifix here? Yes, and a breviary, on the table; and a cassock that hangs at the back of a door. Now what should cassock, mass book, and crucifix be doing in the Maison de Julie?

Mutation and contrast; but then, all life is mutation and contrast; so, perhaps, is all death. And here, where a subtle air of human passion lingers still—here where Madame Julie the widow wooed her poet—a celibate, a priest, a chaplain, Monsieur the Abbé Archange, is housed to-day.

Let us pass the inner door from which the cassock hangs, and enter a bedroom. The Abbé Archange is there, and so is his guest. The Abbé stands stoopingly, looking down on his guest; on Dick Stewart, who half sits and half lies in the middle of a camp-bed, outside the coverlet, with his right leg bared to the knee. A posture quite unheroic, of course; but then, let me say it again, Dick Stewart has never been a hero to himself.

His right foot is thrust out clear of the bed, and is held above the well of a hip-bath which rests on the floor. The foot is bandaged, and the bandage is dripping with water. Around and above the foot a stand has been contrived, to support a filter which from time to time the Abbé refills. The tap of the filter is turned right on, so that a full trickle of water constantly descends upon the hurt ankle, to keep the bandage saturated and then fall plop-plop into the bath. Bandaging and hydropathy, together with temporary imprisonment, are to make the cure; temporary imprisonment for patient and doctor both. Daylight and incoming airs invite them out, but Dick Stewart and the Abbé inhabit the small bedroom, regarding one another like patient and doctor, as solemn as owls.

"Think it really will?" the patient asks again, for the fourth or fifth time within one hour.

"I am sure it will," the Abbé says. "It will by this time to-morrow, I hope. That is, if you observe the conditions. You are rather a restless patient, are you not?"

The Abbé, tall and spare and stately, with a fine manner and much dignified amenity, smiles a little as he speaks; he is speaking English, and excellent English too.

Dick Stewart's eyes wander away from his foot and rest on a photograph, which hangs from the wall.

"Yes, that's old Rory!" he says again, for the fourth or fifth time. "It's quite the biggest kind of surprise to find that you actually know old Rory! *Isn't* he a good fellow! He knocked the nonsense out of me again, after Oxford, very quick. To find his old phiz looking at me here! The odd way things turn out!"

"The world shrinks every year," the Abbé says. "Everybody will know everybody else, before very long."

"That will be his sister with him," Dick Stewart says, still looking at the photograph.

"Yes," says the Abbé slowly. "His sister Mary."

"Do you know, though he's such a chum of mine, I never met her myself. She was married—went to Australia or somewhere."

"Yes," says the Abbé, slowly again, "she went to Melbourne."

"Good old Rory chap! So splendid that you should know him, Monsieur! If he were here he would save you all this trouble with me. . . . Rotten nuisance for you, my being lame—or here at all, matter o' that! You practically had to carry me here, I'm afraid. I'm giving you the most unconscionable bother."

"Not in the very least," the Abbé says, in his stately but cordial way. "It is very good of you to give me a little practice."

"Practice?" Dick Stewart says the word inquiringly. "And you think you can make me fit again in twenty-four hours? . . . Forgive me, dear Abbé, but—how do you know?"

"I know, because I am a surgeon," the Abbé says, and the patient opens eyes of surprise.

"Yes, indeed, I am qualified to practise, even on an Englishman. I was at Bart's, as you call it, over yonder—that is how I made acquaintance with Loxton-Phipps. He could hardly do better for you than I shall. Or even"—the Abbé smiles a little—"apothecary Blain in the village."

"I'm sure they couldn't!" Dick Stewart says heartily. "Particularly your apothecary Blain! Reminds me of an advertisement I saw, 'Wanted, a strong donkey, to do a country doctor's work!'" He laughs. "Sir, I trust myself to you absolutely; that was simply a topping pick-me-up you gave me, I'm quite myself again, except this foot. . . . But, Monsieur, if you are qualified as a surgeon, why on earth—" He stops and reddens, but still looks at the Abbé with wonder.

The Abbé hardly looked a priest. His cassock was off, we know—we saw it hanging on the door—and he was wearing the very uncanonical garb of knickerbockers and shooting-jacket. Knickerbockers and a shooting-jacket, even though they hang loosely upon a thin body and are made of the darkest possible grey tweed, do not assort with black-and-white muslin bands and silver-buckled highlows. Just as incongruous with them, too, was the tonsure, that precise little disc of shaven scalp seen amidst wavy dark hair.

The cassock would have reconciled all those, of course. Cast about the tall spare form it would have made a fitting pedestal for the high narrow head, the oval face, and the complexion of gleaming pallor. But the cassock was hanging on the door.

"Yes?" the Abbé said. "You were asking why on earth—" ?

"Forgive me," Dick Stewart said. "I was asking something quite impertinent."

"You could hardly do that, I am sure."

"But I *have* done it, a hundred times, I assure you! I enjoy the very worst health in the matter of manners—I'm thoughtless and inconsequent often, I——"

"Permit me not to believe you," the Abbé said, meeting Dick Stewart's gaze with a comprehending smile. And in that moment something passed from eye to eye and the two men struck hands together, so to speak, in friendship.

The relation of doctor and patient had prepared them for that; the photograph had united their memories and given them a link in the past. The priest had succoured Dick Stewart, and Dick Stewart could never avoid paying his debts. He could not forget the smallest of them, or be careless, or, still less, cynical about one, and gratitude is the greatest debt of all. "He's a friend of Rory's," the patient was thinking, "so he *must* be a good fellow, anyhow."

"Clearly a gentleman, and fond of Loxton-Phipps. So he must be all right," the Abbé was thinking.

"Things which are equal to the same thing are equal to one another," Dick Stewart was reflecting, "and men who are friends of the same man ought to be friends themselves."

The frank and inevitable charm of Stewart's style and nature had won its way already; so had the stately sad gentleness of the priest. Each saw in the other his dissimilar and complement. Out of such meetings a spark of friendship is quickly struck, to lighten and brighten. The two men suddenly understood each other, in a communion of sympathy. They fitted; in musical terms they made not unison but a perfect chord. And now each spoke in the same breath and moment.

"You are wondering——" the priest began.

"What am I to call you?" began the other.

"Why I am a priest, are you not?"

"I can't call you *mon père*, you know."

"Please do not—I should dislike it from you."

"I shall call you Abbé."

"No, nor even Abbé. I am younger than I look, I am not so very much your elder——"

"Should think not, indeed!" Dick Stewart broke in warmly. "Five or six years at the most!"

"And what my friends call me is Archange."

"Your friends?" Stewart's voice had an upward inflection.

"My friends, yes. I have only a few. Will you be one?"

"That's very pleasant of you, you know. If I may, I will. Yes, by Damon and Pythias, I will!" Dick Stewart held out a quick hand and gave a gripping clasp. "I think you have been simply splendid about me, Abbé! In the Courts, you know, a fellow is always your learned friend, no matter how much you detest him for a cad and a bounder. I've had very few real friends myself. Rory's been almost my only one. Though it's astonishing how kind people are to me often—perfect strangers, even, right off. Do you mean you like me already? Shake hands again!"

Then, with the usual British check on feeling, "Is this quite English of us, do you think, though? I take you to be an Englishman yourself, Abbé. But the fellows at Bart's would think all this a trifle French."

"I happen to be French," the Abbé said, and smiled.

"No! Do you? I beg your pardon, then! Of course, you're a priest and. . . . But I thought you'd be an English Catholic."

"I lived in England for years, but I am French by blood."

"Very good blood too, I'm sure," Dick Stewart said warmly.

The Abbé's face became clouded a little. "Ye-es," he said. "An old family enough, and once very powerful. Famille de—Grandemaison."

"Yes, I remember,—Pied-de-nez said you were M. de Grandemaison's nephew."

The Abbé frowned. "Pied-de-nez is a little too curious about us, perhaps."

Dick Stewart's face went scarlet. "He guided me here, by-the-by. . . . I'm afraid you'll think I am too curious myself!"

"But you are so by accident," the Abbé said. "Do you know, you collapsed rather badly?"

"Collapsed! You put it mildly! I fainted, confound

me! Fainted like a woman. You put it too politely when you say collapsed! I'm sure you all thought me a milksop. . . . Did any ladies see me like that, by-the-by?"

"My cousin did," said the priest. "And her companion. But what of that? No cause for shame, my dear sir. You must have had pain enough to make a bullock faint!"

"And I'm a John Bullock," Dick Stewart said, lightly again. "Oh well, it doesn't much matter! Though an Englishman would rather die than faint. . . . I'm Scottish in origin, by-the-by; but I'm English now, quite English—you'll have noticed it. . . . Do you know, I rather fancy my leg's going to sleep. Think I might move it a trifle? . . . Yes, thank you—like that."

Then the Abbé shifted the stand and the filter, and the trickle and plop-plop went on again; the cooling, bracing, antifebrile flow. It descended, curled around the ankle, kept the bandage saturated, and began to tell on the swelling; musically the little cascade sounded, almost keeping time to the tic-tac of a little alarm clock at the bedside; while silent again the two men sat, looking at one another, solemn as owls.

XXII

"DEAF man's holiday!" the patient said. "I don't know why we aren't talking—'tisn't because of my delicate health, I trust? I like you, if you will let me say so." But he still was chary of using a name. "You're a priest and all that, and I'm usually rather shy of priests and parsons. But you're so much of what John Evelyn called a 'very courteous fryer' that I feel I've known you for ages. If only Rory were here with us! Extraordinary thing you knowing him—I wrote him only last night."

Then he flushed, at a sudden remembrance of what he had put in that letter. "Wonder if Rory would recognize her?" he thought. "He'd be sure to remember Bonne! Strange thing he never mentioned the Grandmasons or Knibbses to me! . . ." Then, growing bolder as he speculated, "So you were at Bart's," he said, to enter his confusion. "How long ago?"

"Forgive me?" The Abbé spoke hesitatingly, for he too had been musing. "You were asking—"

"How long it is since you knew Rory Loxton-Phipps at Bart's?"

"I left the hospital six—seven—yes, quite seven years ago."

"That would be about the time I began to cat my dinners at the Temple. . . . Wonder we never met. Strange thing Rory never spoke of you!"

"I wish we had met," the Abbé said hurriedly. "But I have always had to be rather solitary. Loxton-Phipps was friendly, but . . . something came between us," he went on, with momentary huskiness. "If we could have remained friends I might never have——"

He paused, and watching him closely in the silence, Dick Stewart seemed suddenly to understand.

"Why did you, why *did* you?" he cried. "I suppose it's hopeless—I mean irrevocable—now? You can't think what I'm feeling about it for you, I've always so pitied fellows who had to go into the Church, and then, when it was too late——" He paused.

The Abbé smiled a little. "It is not quite the same thing, is it? The English look down on priests, but a parson is always a gentleman?"

"By courtesy, anyhow." Dick Stewart spoke rather slowly. "They used to be gentlemen in fact, as a rule. Hope they are so now, too, most of 'em, but—well, they're not 'Varsity men, or scholars, or good at games, so often nowadays. A parson who can't quote Horace or play cricket, you know. . . . They keep up their social claims just as much, you see. . . . Cleverest woman I know says she could love the Church if it weren't for the curates! . . . And if you heard the language fellows who have to dine 'em in the country use about 'em in clubs! . . ."

"My friend," the Abbé said, "you are an aristocrat!"

Dick Stewart blushed like a lad. "That is what the woman at the inn told me yesterday! Dare say I *am* stuck-up, by-the-by. I try not to be, I assure you, but it is rather difficult for me,—the Stewarts are the Royal clan, you see, and . . . well, we have always been more or less howling swells. . . . No, but it's not pride, what I'm saying about curates. It's pity! Poor broadcloth little beggars—they *do* run small, as a rule, you'll have noticed—with a position to keep up on a hundred and fifty—and a wife—and children, any number of children!"

The priest's face changed, and "I beg your pardon awfully!" Dick Stewart went on. "Blundering ass that I am! I ought not to have mentioned that part of the business! Of course you can't sympathize with the troubles of married curates! I don't see it that way, mind you, though I suppose I ought to do, considering . . . well, my mother's religion, anyhow. And I don't want you to think I don't respect parsons, you know. I do. I respect 'em so much that I'm afraid of 'em. As a rule parsons are such—

such parsons, you know. Naturally people don't love them madly, they're a kind of living reproach. Myself, I'm full of original sin, and I've acquired a lot into the bargain. All the same, I don't want you to think I'm joking at priests. Priests are different, aren't they! No social pretensions about priests. That's why one never refuses them position. No, I respect *you* immensely. I'm sure you make quite a topping priest, by-the-by."

The Abbé frowned. "I make a very unfit and unhappy one."

"No? Do you?" Dick Stewart sat looking at the Abbé with *naïve* pity. "I say, you know . . . why did you, why did you?"

The Abbé's throat seemed to be dry; he swallowed. "Why not?" he said, in a little. "It is a dignified thing to be a priest, and there must be dignity for a Grandemaison. . . . We are poor, too; and a priest may be poor without scorn."

"But I hardly understand? Are the Grandemaïsons poor? You have bought this château?"

"I think you do understand," the Abbé said, gravely. "Perhaps you understand a little too much. . . . What do you know about us, Stewart—tell me!"

"Certainly I will. I meant to. Yes, by Jove, I couldn't do any less than tell you. . . . If you don't mind tightening this blessed bandage again, first?—I really believe the swelling must be going down."

The Abbé bent over the foot. "Take your time," he said. "There!" He had finished re-winding the bandage, and was rubbing his fine white hands with a towel. "You stand it well, Stewart, though it hurts, I suppose?"

"Hurts like the deuce!" Dick Stewart grunted. "Though I beg your pardon, again, for mentioning him! . . . I'm sure he's in it, though, somehow. Most extraordinary thing how it began; it was either the deuce or Pied-de-nez. . . ." He shifted on the bed. "But it brought me here, anyhow!"

"Now then," he went on, "I'll tell you all, Abbé. I'll tell you everything, I'll be utterly frank about it. I

couldn't be here and not tell you, it wouldn't be straight, even for a fellow in love. 'All's fair in love and war' I consider a detestable maxim—man who invented it must have been a scamp!"

"You are in love, then?"

"I believe I am," Dick Stewart said solemnly. "I am pretty absolutely sure I am. If I'm not, I don't suppose anybody ever was. The Don wasn't in love, Mr. Toots wasn't in love, Romeo wasn't in love, if I'm not. That's why I came looking for your château. The Château d'Or is it's called, I now understand. But there's somebody who sends telegrams to London and calls it Château Royal."

"Ah!" The priest leaned back in his chair.

"I don't know why, I haven't the least curiosity to know why," Dick Stewart went on. "Don't think I'm here to pry and fish out secrets, I'm not, I assure you! I'm simply here because . . . oh, can't you see?" he cried blurtily and almost angrily. "Don't you guess that I'm in love with Madame R.?"

"With Madame——?" The Abbé stared at him. "With Madame R.? You mean——?"

"I mean Madame R.," Dick Stewart said testily. "I speak loud enough, I hope? I don't know the full name—how should I, with confounded secrets and things about? Madame R., that's all I know, except—and it's a tremendous except—that I love her, I love her, and always shall! . . . And you won't be going to tell me that she's not here, because she is, I saw her, I saw her a second or two before I went off again! In my faint, confound it!" he went on, disgustedly. "A pretty sort of milksop she'd think me! She was gone when I came to again, I know, but I suppose she is somewhere here?"

"Yes," said the Abbé, "she is here."

"I said so, didn't I?" The tension was telling on Stewart's nerves. "And you're not going to tell me she's married to a Monsieur R., because I say to you flatly I won't believe it! . . . Though I'd rather hear you say that, mind you, than have you say she is going to marry the bounder. I mean the Comte, of course. Such a washy person—such a cuckoo—you ought to have seen his rig-out

this morning, going shooting—ought to be shot himself! And I naturally can't bear the idea that . . . She isn't, is she? If she does, why——" He sat up, suddenly. "I can suffer fools pretty gladly, Abbé—I can even suffer myself. But not *that* bounder. No! He cut me this morning, when I spoke to him—cut *me*, Francis Benedick Stewart, who could give him fits at lineage! You know what old John Evelyn said of his own father? Said he was 'of a sanguine complexion, mixt with choler.' That's myself, too. And if she marries the bounder, I'll . . . shoot him—or myself—or something! I'm too odiously selfish to stand the thought of his having her! . . . I once picked up a book called 'Suicide, its Antidotes and Anecdotes.' There'll be a new anecdote if he does. I believe there are acids and things, aren't there? Prussic or carbonic things, that do for you neatly?"

"Hush, hush!" said the Abbé, who had been watching him with the eyes of one who himself knows the jealous pang. "Hush, my friend—you mean my cousin Consolata, don't you?"

"Of course I do!"

"You said Madame R.?"

"And isn't she Madame R.?"

The Abbé reflected. "Yes, I suppose . . . in a telegram M. de Grandemaison would write Madame R."

"Said so, didn't I?" Dick Stewart snapped. "You don't explain very much, do you? You part with your answers like teeth, Abbé. Why won't you explain?"

"I must not. I am not here to explain," the Abbé said, with a touch of haughtiness. "How often have you seen my cousin Consolata?"

"Four times," said Dick Stewart, gloomily. "Five times, reckoning a second or two, to-day."

"And she has seen you——"

"Three times, to notice me. And that's reckoning to-day as well. . . . Ghastly kind of ass she must have thought me to-day! What did I look like, Abbé? Did she see me like that long?"

"My cousin did not stay. M. de Grandemaison wished her not to stay. Bonne took her away, almost at once."

"Yes, Bonne," Dick Stewart grumbled. "As usual, Bonne. Bonne is always taking her away. Square sort of woman, Bonne. Thinks nobody else can be on the square. And refuses to be squared anyhow."

The Abbé smiled. "You describe her well," he said. "You must have seen her often. In fact, Stewart——" He paused.

"Yes, Abbé. Go on."

"Tell me. . . . I hope I'm not unduly suspicious, but we have a secret here. It would be safe with you, I don't doubt, but we would prefer that nobody should know of it. You have surprised a part of our secret. . . . Won't you tell me all you know?"

"I was going to," Dick Stewart said glumly. "I'd begun. It was you interrupted. If you'll kindly keep quiet till I've finished—and let me smoke. Tobacco will improve my manners, Abbé—and won't hurt my ankle, will it? Won't get into the tendons or Achilles, or whatever you call the confounded things? No? All right, then—if you don't mind handing me a match. . . . One comfort left to me, anyway." And then, while wavery diaphanous cobwebs spun from a cigarette went floating out of window, the tale of the long love-quest was told.

At the end of the story the Abbé rose, walked to the window, and stood looking out, tapping his fingers on the sill. Then he turned, came back to the bedside, and put his hand upon Stewart's with a comforting touch.

"I am exceedingly sorry for you," he said. "I would alter it if I could. But you are half prepared for it, aren't you? What you fear is to happen. My cousin is to marry the Comte."

XXIII

DICK STEWART sat perfectly still for a full minute, as though struck speechless and motionless; while something swelled in his throat, and then seemed to go roaring up into his brain. Then, "Sentence, that is!" he growled, as he swung himself off the bed and went hopping across the room to a towel-rack. "Sentence!" he growled again. "Judgment with costs against me! And no leave to appeal!" He was standing on one foot while he rubbed the other, and hopping now and then to retain his equilibrium; a very unheroic posture again, no doubt.

"All right," he went on, "I can go away. . . . I must." He spoke queerly, his throat being dry; he used the towel awkwardly, for his hands were trembling. "I must go away at once, Abbé. We Stewarts have been a pretty bad lot, and if I stay and happen to see that puppy, that arrogant pup! . . ."

"Lie down again, man!" the priest said sternly.

"Think I'll take it lying down, do you, Abbé Archange?" There was the shadow of a smile. "No thanks, as my friend Mr. Robert Shott would say! . . . Archange, I like you immensely, you're no end of a brick, and all that, but . . . I'll go to Provenchel again! . . . No, I won't, I might meet that puppy there, and if I did. . . . Isn't there a place called Listrac somewhere? The signpost said there was. That signpost said something else, too, by-the-by. And I was a fool not to listen." He caught at the towel-rack, and it creaked as he leaned upon it. "If I hadn't come I could have thought of her as she was in the Fields. Now I shall have to think of her as being married to that. . . ." The Abbé heard a deep

exclamation, and then a sigh. Then, "Hard lines!" Dick Stewart muttered. . . .

He began to hop again. "You can get me a trap of some sort, I suppose?" he said, flicking the air with the towel. "To land me at Listrac, I mean? I hardly suppose I could walk it, yet." He hopped across the room to the bed. "If you wouldn't mind getting up a second, by-the-by—my sock's on your chair."

"Lie down again, Stewart—don't play the fool!"

"I've played it!" Dick Stewart said bitterly. "I'm always playing it. I play it so well. Five weeks I've been playing it—no, nine! I expect you've heard of the musical critic, and what he said about the awful band? Forty men in it, all playing the same instrument, he said. Well, that's my instrument too. But never no more! No thanks! I quote my friend Mr. Shott again. . . . Pretty rough, though, this!" he muttered.

"Lie down again, Stewart!" The Abbé towered, as a priest should do in a moment of command. "Your foot under the water again this minute, if you please! You are spoiling my cure. . . . Why should you resent it like this? Do you think you are the only one? Why, man"—the Abbé's voice thrilled strangely—"I took the tonsure!"

"Good lord!" Stewart had been startled out of his own trouble. "Is *that* why you're a priest, Archange?"

The Abbé leaned back in his chair, and was speaking as if to himself.

"Hundreds!" he said. "Hundreds like me, every year. . . . We sell our shadows, and then we want them back again. We love and we lose, we hate the world for it, we think we will abjure the world and the flesh. . . ."

"And you find it the very devil!" Dick Stewart said gently.

"We feel a pain and ask the Church to cauterize it. We take the tonsure," the Abbé went on. "The tonsure, the ugly sign of our vows. And the humiliation of that! I have to go to a barber's, and ask for privacy, and be put to sit down in a kitchen, where the razor renews the sign of the vow! . . . And that is the symbol only. . . . But the

vow itself! Mon Dieu, no wife, no child, no home! No duties of a man or delights! The Church dresses us like a woman, but a woman has her child. . . . If we throw it off, and enter the world again, we are accursed by the Church, and scorned by the world itself. . . . And there is always a face, a face that tortures, a face that we cannot forget. . . ."

He ceased, and in the silence was heard the hasty tic-tac of the little timepiece, and the steady, inevitable, inexorable plop-plop of the water into the bath.

Dick Stewart stirred. He rolled up the towel and pitched it at the rack; he hopped to the bedside and heaved himself on to his back again; he put his foot into position under the filter. "Archange!" he said. "Archange!"

Absently the Abbé regarded him.

"Sorry I let you in for this, Archange—wish I hadn't made you think about it again—don't think about it any more, Archange. I dare say you exaggerate—don't you think you do? As I did, just now. The mood of the minute, you know—it will pass. So will mine, I dare say. . . . Rum thing how fellows run down their profession always. Rory does. So do you. Ever hear a naval man talking about the sea? It's one long string of language, I can tell you! . . . I met a policeman yesterday, a had-been policeman, I mean—I don't think I told you about him, by-the-by—and he positively excommunicated the police!"

The Abbé hardly seemed to hear.

"Archange! Archange, I say! I take back the rot I said about curates. That's what set you on being miserable now, wasn't it? I think it's the finest thing a fellow can do, is entering the Church—any Church, I mean. What business had I to decry the Church? No need to run down anybody else's profession, they run it down themselves quite sufficiently. If I hadn't twelve hundred or so of my own I should have to practise, and then how I'd bedevil the Bar! . . . Same reason why lovers run down love, and married fellows marriage. . . . Archange!"

With sombre eyes the Abbé regarded him.

"Don't suppose you've heard half I said, have you now? I've been comforting you, Archange—you feel comforted, don't you? You ought to do, anyway, for I've been as eloquent as a bird. A bird that has been winged, I don't deny, but . . . I've roared you as gentle as any sucking-dove, and you haven't listened to a syllable! I can't go over it all again, but it comes to this: I fell in love. Of course I did, I can fall into anything! Well, it seems it's no go—I positively gather from your remarks that it is no go. I suffer, of course—I'm hard hit, very hard hit indeed, winged in the left breast, under the third rib, point of fact. But what then? You've been hard hit, too—same thing, a girl, a woman. Made you enter the Church, it did. Rory's sister, I gather, wasn't she?" His eyes had veered from the Abbé's face to the photograph.

"Archange, let's suffer together," Dick Stewart went on, looking anywhere except at the Abbé's troubled face. "I say, suppose I stop with you a bit? I will if you like. A week, if you like. If it will do you any good, I will! I needn't see your cousin, she doesn't come here, of course. Nor the Comte, confound him! Let's be jolly miserable together, Abbé, if it will do you any good. You ought to be doing me good, by-the-by—you ought to discipline me, and all that. I won't let myself make you run down the Church any more, because it isn't exactly the thing of you, is it now, do you think? I dare say the Church isn't half so bad as you've been making out, and you won't think it is yourself to-morrow. . . . By-the-by, an idea! I don't see why *you* should run down the consolations of the Church, you ought to let it console me. I've not been exactly orthodox, I know, but I haven't been heterodox. I'm pseudodox at the worst. I was brought up in your Church, I'm as much a Catholic as anything—point of fact, more! It's not æsthetic to be a Protestant, I consider. Catholicism is much more picturesque. I've got an idea, I say. I shall never be a marrying man, now. Why shouldn't I do what you did? Really, I don't know why I shouldn't! . . . By Jove, yes, I almost think I will! You took orders through it, and why shouldn't I? Prepare me, Archange—begin to get me ready!"

The priest seemed to ignore that impulsive proposal ; he stooped to the lame foot and unwound the bandage.

" You don't answer me, Archange. Perhaps you think I am chaffing ? I'm not, I assure you I'm not. Shouldn't dream of doing it, about a solemn affair like this. I chaff sometimes, but—*ough* ! "

The Abbé was kneading the swollen ankle ; with skilful fingers, strong and white, he was pressing and massaging it, keeping silent the while. Dick Stewart, too, kept silence as much as he could, but once or twice he growled, " I wish you wouldn't, Archange—'pon my word I wish you wouldn't ! " For minutes this went on, until the Abbé sank back into his chair, somewhat panting.

" There now ! " Dick Stewart said with compunction. " It has rather knocked you up ! Archange, I *said* I wished you wouldn't ! I didn't mean hurt me, you could hurt me as much as you pleased, so long as it's surgery. I meant I wished you wouldn't knock yourself up. I've been the most fearful nuisance to you all along—you practically had to carry me here, and you are not any too strong. You should not worry so, Archange, you worry too much to be healthy for you, I can see—and why, above all, should you worry about me ! I am nobody in particular ! I've got a sprained ankle and a broken heart, but I dare say they will mend. In time, that is—I mend pretty easily, as a rule. . . . Don't you think you are rather impolite, by-the-by ? You haven't answered me, I don't believe you even listen ! Didn't you hear what I proposed just now, about the Church ? What do you say ? "

The Abbé lifted his eyes upon Stewart's almost angry. " What do I say ? " He frowned. " You impetuous fellow, do you mean it ? "

" Mean it ? " Dick Stewart cried. " Of course I mean it ! I could mean anything just now ! You don't seem to guess what I'm feeling—and I don't mean in my foot, by the-by. A fellow ought to be granite or gutta-percha to stand a thing like this. You can't imagine half what I'm feeling about it, or . . . Oh, but I forgot ! You can ! "

Silence again, and the two men blinking at each other, solemn as owls in a ruined family-vault.

"Look here!" Dick Stewart said at last. "If the girl I naturally love is going to marry a fellow I naturally hate, there's no choice for me, is there? If I shoot him it hurts her. If I shoot myself it is unpleasant for her. Do you see? Besides, the minute for that is past, I suppose one doesn't do things like that in cold blood. So what is a fellow to do, Archange? 'Marry some one else,' you may say, but I'd rather take the advice of a married man about that. Point of fact, I never knew a married man yet,—who would talk, in his expansive moments, I mean—that didn't warn one off it, unless one can marry where one loves. Very well then, what's the alternative? Celibacy, of course—you see I argue like a logician, I'm reasonable again. But if one is celibate one might as well become a priest and have done with it. And it convinces a girl that you loved her, if you become a priest through losing her; I dare say that is the way you argued it out for yourself. . . . Besides, there's no credit in being celibate if you're not a priest; nobody believes you *are* keeping true to a memory if you're not a priest. I dare say I'm an ass about it, but that's the way it looks to me just now."

"Stewart," said the Abbé, "you know nothing of what you chatter about. I know. I have experimented. You to become a priest! Mon Dieu, man, could you honestly preach? Can you sincerely pray?" His voice rose sharpening into the high sing-song rhetoric of his race as he broke into voluble French. "Mon Dieu, yes—better be a cleaner of pig-styes, better be a warder of lunatics, if you can't! *Do* you believe? Honestly, utterly, rapturously? If you don't, if you *don't*! . . . mon ami, if you don't, better drown yourself than become a priest! When you have quitted the world and the flesh you will find that you long to quit the Church as well. I do. I long to get back, sometimes,—ten! And I'm here, mind you, with few of the duties and discomforts of a priest to trouble me. I'm here, a private chaplain in a lonely château. I need not preach, I read prayers mechanically and none to blame me, my uncle doesn't care—the Grandemaçons have always considered the Church a part of the State. I don't hear confessions, I don't administer sacraments, the parish curé

does all that, yet . . . I tell you, Stewart, a man is worse than a fool, he is a rogue, to become a priest, unless he can sincerely do all that a priest is vowed to do. And, above all, unless he can forget !” . . .

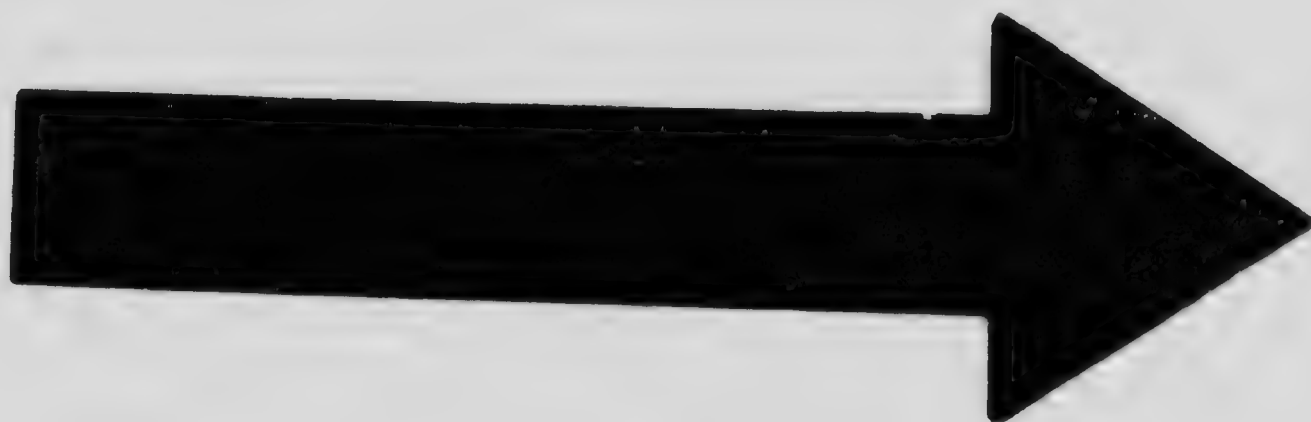
There was silence again. The Abbé's head drooped, as he lay back in his chair.

Dick Stewart shifted his foot, and drew himself up on the bed till he was sitting on the pillow.

“Very well, Archange,” he said, “I won't. I give the idea up. I don't suppose I ever really meant it, by-the-by. . . . Remarkable queer thing, though, how people warn you off ! Shott did ; on no account was I to become a policeman !” He laughed. “And now you ! Very well, it's settled, I am not to be a priest. But what *am* I to do, dear man ? I can't stay here, I can't rush off to Paris and be gay, it isn't the season. I don't know where I'll go, unless it's to the deuce ! Nothing else for it, seems to me. Only one distraction left, seems to me. Wine, give me wine ! Wonderful stuff, wine—a great consoler, I've always heard. Liquid comfort, to mix with Lethe water. Put vine leaves in my hyacinthine hair, Archange—bring me vast Gargantuan flagons, let me swill sweet oblivion—no, dry, I prefer it sec, extra-sec ! You never heard of the Swiss landlord's English, when he advertised his wines, did you ? He announced that ‘in this hotel the wines leave the traveller nothing to hope for.’ That is *me*, Archange ; I have nothing to hope for now. So let me drown disappointment and be jolly and red-nosed and bland. Let me hiccough, let me titubate and forget !”

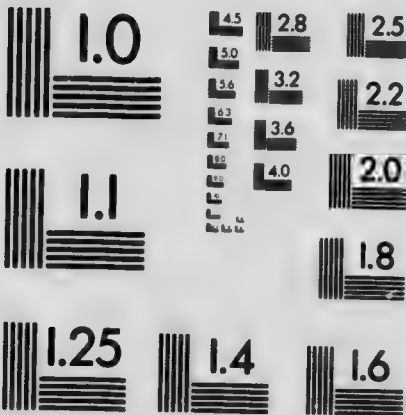
“The worst thing possible for you, with that ankle.”

Dick Stewart laughed again. “Oh, matter-of-fact Archange, do you think I would ? No, I'm hardly that kind of coward. Oh no, I'll see it out, I'll. . . .” He paused : he threw up his arms, and snapped his fingers, in a gesture of proud *insouciance*, and “Why not ?” he cried. “See it out, and cut him out ? Why not ? . . . You'll help me, won't you, Archange ? You can't like the boulder yourself, I'm sure ! You couldn't, you're true blue. . . . If



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you'll let me stay with you a few days, and give me a chance. . . . What's that?"

A knock on the door had sounded, and now the latch was lifting. The door came open a little, and a face appeared. It was the face of an elderly man, and a serving-man, blank with a practised vacuity of expression except for a kind of awe.

"What is it, Tronk?" the priest asked.

"Monseigneur. . . ." He looked at Stewart. "Can I speak to you, Monseigneur?"

"Tsh-h! Don't you see I. . . ." Angrily the Abbé hurried to the door.

Monseigneur! Left alone in the bedroom, Dick sat petrified, rigid with surprise, clutching the bowl of his pipe which he held in air, half way to his mouth. And in the strained silence the flurried tic-tac of the little clock made quite a terrible noise.

XXIV

"Good heavens above! *Monseigneur*? . . . He certainly said *Monseigneur*! . . . Whew-w-w!" Dick Stewart whistled low. "*Monseigneur*! He *said* *Monseigneur*. . . . He did indeed! . . ."

"That was what the old fellow said, not a doubt of it! And got snubbed for it! *Monseigneur* was very angry with him for saying it! Practically drubbed him out! *Monseigneur*! That means he's an Archbishop or something like that. And I've been calling him Archchange and . . . Whew-w-w! . . ."

Dick Stewart sat up, remembering things which he had said. "Things I wouldn't have said to a Dean, even, if I had known! Dick Stewart, you have missed a splendid opportunity for holding your tongue! . . ."

"What would my father have thought of this!" His father, he remembered, had an absolute reverence for the princes of his Church. "My father, God bless him wherever he is, would have thought what I've said to an Archbishop a mortal sin!"

So here was another mystery! Nothing but mystery and bother about this confounded Château d'On! "I've walked right into it!" he mused. "I was warned enough, too!" "Va pas!" the signpost had said. He had disregarded the warning. Trouble upon trouble had come like vengeance on him for that. His foot, the sudden pain and lameness, the pangs and the fainting, the meeting with the Comte, the news of Consolata's betrothal! And now the swift extinction of the last flash of dying hope! For how could the cousin of a French Archbishop be brought to wed a pseudodox Englishman with only twelve hundred a

year? Particularly when the Englishman had shown himself so swiftly familiar, and slangy, and extravagant in language, and all that!

"But how was *I* to know he was an Archbishop? He doesn't wear the livery! Not a scrap of the purple about him anywhere! . . . Monseigneur! His Grandeur, that is! And I have chaffed him, rather—and called him Archchange!

"Then why in the name of Bedlam doesn't he wear his insignia? He doesn't,—not even the amethyst ring! How is a fellow to know an Archbishop except by the regalia and paraphernalia? . . . So young for it, too—who expects a priest to be an Archbishop at thirty-five or so?"

Dick Stewart knit his brows in perplexity and annoyance. *Could* it be true? The serving-man at the door had said "Monseigneur" sure enough. Yet it seemed so unlikely to be true. Less than ten years a priest, how could the Abbé have become an Archbishop already? And what should he be doing here, away from his see and palace and duties, hidden in a nook of the Haute Limousin? . . . But "Monseigneur" had been the word, sure enough.

Suddenly the thought of the picture stolen from Saumur came into his mind, as though by some occult yet exterior suggestion; perhaps because his restless eyes had fallen for a moment on the portrait of Rory and his sister, hanging from the wall. "I wonder!" he said to himself. "I wonder if . . ." But what on earth could the portrait of the last Duc de Normandie have to do with all this? . . . Yet there had been Coco, startled at the mere mention of Château Royal. And Coco's father, who was an *agent de police*. . . . And for the matter of that, by the same token, Mr. Robert Shott, late of the Metropolitan force, who talked about a stolen picture himself!

"It's the very dickens of a riddle!" Dick Stewart muttered. "It's worse than one of the conundrum things which people concoct for Christmas. I give it up, I give it up!"

But he could not give it up; he still must puzzle and conjecture. . . . For Consolata was involved in it all. Consolata, Consolata! Her sweetness, her intangibility!

The little short proud upper-lip, that lifted and showed a gleam of teeth, above the rounded under-lip, that drooped so pathetically. Consolata, pride and pathos—Consolata, pathos and pride!

He had found her only to lose her. More intangible than ever now she would be. Consolata de Grandemaison, daughter of a house to which an Archbishop belonged! She would know her exalted station, she had known it in London, she had known it while she knelt in the old red church. It was that which gave and justified her sweet pride of manner. And here he was in the Maison de Julie, guest of a priest to whom he had been telling, without the seal of the confessional, how he had followed her into that hallowed and consecrated old church! To an Archbishop, he had told all that! To an *Archbishop*!

Yet an Archbishop, by-the-by, who did not look or act the part; yes, he could allow that amount of justification to himself. An Archbishop who had talked as simply and friendly as a mere *cure* could have done; an Archbishop without an atom of assumption or side. An Archbishop who had confessed to temptations, an Archbishop who had actually run down the Church! . . . Oh, it was incredible! The lunacy of it! So preposterously and enormously insane!

And this was the sort of thing which happened at Château Royal! "What kind of a shop can it be, after all?" he wondered. "A madhouse, one would think! Yes, a madhouse it almost seems."

He struck his fist down into the pillow. "Yes, by Jove! A madhouse, that's the explanation! Pied-de-nez took me for a lunatic, as he might, and he cleverly manœuvred me here. This an asylum, and naturally I've gravitated towards it! By Jove, yes! that explains it all!"

Yet—Consolata! His face twitched oddly. Consolata could not be insane. "Though, point of fact, to think of giving herself to *that* bounder——" Again the pillow flattened under his fist.

M. de Grandemaison must be mad himself to permit it. "And Bonne—yes, certainly Bonne is mad!" A maniac even Pied-de-nez had called her.

It would explain nearly everything, he reflected, if Château Royal really were an asylum for the insane. First of all it would explain why a mad chaplain was addressed as Monseigneur—the valet himself would be harmlessly mad. And even the chaplain must be a mad surgeon, who believed himself a priest. It would explain the mad telegram to London, which called a château a shrine and addressed a girl as Madame. It would explain why the imp at the quarry should run off in fear and yell for his father at the mere mention of the château's mad name. It would explain why Pied-de-nez, himself a zany, should know all about the château so well. That, too, would be why the chemineau refused to venture close to it; that lunatics have a special dread of asylums is well known.

"Shott, too—Shott must belong to this place. . . . For certainly Shott is mad. Talks of the law and the police in the craziest way. And carries eggs about—a sure sign of madness in anybody but a hen! Shott's been here and escaped, I dare say, but, as madmen and murderers will, he lingers round the very spot, like the fellow in the Sims Reeves ballad! . . . Ah, a mad world, my masters! A madder I never knew. . . . Perhaps I'm mad myself, by-the-by? Shouldn't wonder. . . . Archange, if he *is* a priest, being crazy with love like me, is put here by the Pope appropriately, to be the insane chaplain of the insane! . . . Here he comes, by-the-by—here he comes! Now what in the name of Bedlam am I to say?"

The door was opening, and the priest reappeared. He smiled at Stewart.

"That was old Tronk, the faithful Tronk," he said. "M. de Grandemaison's valet. He helped me to help you here."

"He called you Monseigneur," said the forth-right Dick Stewart. "I have been wondering why?"

"Ah, you noticed that?" the Abbé said with annoyance. "He always does; he did when I was at Bart's—it is quite a mania with him."

"Exactly," Dick Stewart said. "A mania. Quite as I thought. The whim of a maniac. Strictly interpreted, the

word man is an abbreviation of maniac. I dare say we are all of us madder than we know. Even the most distinguished of us—Princes, Ministers of State, Peers, and Members of Parliament in particular. Nothing more amusing to the 'cute observer than the solemn craziness of conceited great people, don't you think? I dare say I'm more than half a lunatic myself. Hope it isn't much more than half, but—if you happen to know of a comfortable kind of asylum anywhere here, Monseigneur? May I ask you, by-the-by why you do not wear your ring and biretta?"

The priest regarded him keenly. "I trust you will not call me Monseigneur," he said. "I am not that. I am not your Seigneur—you are English."

"Scottish," said Dick Stewart.

"As you please," said the priest. "But you are not French, in any case. . . . You are changed, Stewart—why do you look at me so strangely? You are not what you were five minutes ago!"

"Things do change in five minutes," Dick Stewart said. "I have noticed that often. The world travels a long way in five minutes, and the movement alters one's point of view. Five minutes ago I did not understand that I had been talking to an Archbishop!"

"You have not," the Abbé said, looking at him calmly. "I am no Archbishop—I am not a Monseigneur actually. If I were, what matter? I do not ask you to revere me, I want you for a companion, and, I trust, a friend."

"Proud—vastly proud! Honoured, I'm sure!" said Dick Stewart, with a politeness that seemed to irritate the priest.

"I wish old Tronk——" The Abbé set his lips in an expression of annoyance. "What is it that has happened to you, Stewart, so suddenly?"

"I'm mad, do you see," said Dick Stewart. "You have only just found it out. I don't wonder you didn't find it out earlier. I only knew it myself a minute or so ago. I am not actually changed, any more than you are actually an Archbishop. You have found me out, that's all!"

"Nonsense!" said the Abbé. "I wish old Tronk——" He set his lips again. "Think nothing of what Tronk

says, he is a privileged old person, like Bonne. You may hear him give us all sorts of titles, but take no heed. It is a mania of his."

"Exactly," said Dick Stewart. "A mania. Just as I thought, Monseigneur. Anybody else here with a mania, by-the-by?"

"Possibly M. de Grandemaison may seem to you rather strange. But he has suffered a great wrong. Take no notice of his strangeness, Stewart. Whatever he may say or assume, don't think it too queer. He is coming here in an hour. . . . I wish very much. . . ." He paused.

"What do you wish, sir, do you say?"

"I wish all this could have been avoided."

Dick Stewart swung himself off the bed. "I will go away at once," he stiffly said.

"You can't, and you must not!"

"I can and I will!"

"Stewart, don't be a proud idiot!"

"Can't help it, as a rule."

"Help it now, man. Stay. Stay with me a time. I want you to stay. See now, I trust you, I put you on your honour, you will learn all about us before long. You will not betray us, I am certain. . . . Besides . . . Stewart, I can't say I will help you to marry my cousin, but this I will tell you—I wish to prevent her marrying the Comte!"

"Do you, by Jove! I'll stop then!" Dick Stewart was suddenly beaming all over. "Of course I will, Abbé, that's partly what I came for! Why didn't you say that before? . . . Archange,—*may* I call you Archange?—you give me hope. I'm very susceptible to hope. The last infirmity of noble minds is not pride but hope. Mine is a noble mind, you will have noticed that, and even now I can hope! You are not an Archbishop, of course, and I'm . . . ad. I believe I have been thinking you insane, but—I suppose we all are. What's the odds if we *are* insane, so long as we are happy?"

"That's better of you!" said the priest. "Come with me outside. Put your hand on my shoulder. We will go into the garden—I can fix up the filter there. Tronk has brought us a basket—usually I eat at the château, but

Tronk has brought our luncheon here. Rather late, but it is not spoiled—it is what Bonne calls a ‘cold collection.’ M. de Grandemaison sent it with a message. He purposes to meet you here, at four o’clock precisely. My uncle is very precise. Try to please him, Stewart,—do not notice any queerness. . . . Who knows? My cousin is not married yet!”

XXV

MEANWHILE, at the spot where the lawn and the garden touch the charmille, Consolata has been feeding peafowl. The empty basket rests beside her, upon an old bench of stone that is veined with lichen. Two gorgeous creatures, the archbishops of their order, spread the Argus eyes of their "loilage" to gaze at Consolata; their zenana of meek drab wives and timid offspring hide just within the edge of the charmille. Consolata rests; almost sleepily, and in the shadow, she rests, for it is three o'clock and the heat of that day of gold and azure is now at its height; she rests on the old stone bench that is known as the "banc de Julie."

Just there the charmille has been hollowed out into the concave of half an oval. That was done a century and a half ago, to give shade to the day-dreams of Madame Julie herself as she rested there. Here would she sit, in the summer days of her autumn, to gaze upon her sumptuous little château asleep on its lawns: here would she think again of her poet gone to Parnassus—to the slopes of it, that is, to the lower meadows of that difficult hill—Alain Leu her poet, who had left her, who was dead and gone. Here, too, would she muse of Court and King and Cardinal, of bygone minuets and silenced wooings. And here to-day sits Consolata, thinking of Madame Julie and the Maison as she has never done before.

Magnificent Madame Julie! In her way a Catherine, masterful, manful, la Lionne. But she is dead, and Consolata turns to think of some one masterful, manful, and alive. Consolata, her beautiful arms thrown idly upon the high back of the curving bench, and the shade of the charmille flickering down upon her, tremulous golden

coin of light cast between leaves in a Danaë shower, makes a picture for a Marcus Stone. Ah, the fair hair, the sea-shell face, the eyes of sapphire-violet shadowed by dark lashes that give them a mysterious charm. Ah, the slight but rounded form, white-clad, in a gown which light and shadow tissue and diaper till it seems of magic web and woof. And ah, the proud young heart that is growing tender, that flutters while she muses. She knows the history of the château and the great love that built it; she dreams of the passion that lingers about the Maison still. But she is thinking of the stranger within the gates, of the "steward" who has wandered away from his ship or his manor to find her and see her again. She recalls the ease and grace of his first salute, under the arch at Lincoln's Inn Fields; the power of his presence as he stood, bowed and nobly humble, in the red old church. Then she sees again the pallor of his face under the arch at Château Royal. Even so, though not with such white simplicity, Madame Julie resting there used to think of Alain Leu.

The figure of the Englishman, lamed in his haste to find her, is the first gallant figure of a lover ever reflected in the clear mirror of Consolata's mind: Dick Stewart, pursuing and persistent but reverent, is the one romantic lover she has known. For her life has been so cloistered; from childhood up to womanhood she had been guarded and companioned by women alone. This is the month of August, and until the month of March she dwelt in a convent school; all her life, from ten years old to twenty, she has been cloistered and schooled. The Ursuline nuns of Passy have taught and formed her; if the laws and officers of a sovereign Republic had not broken in upon the convent calmness, the Ursuline nuns at Passy might be teaching and guiding her to-day. And she is not yet used and assimilated to the outer world.

But the Ursuline nuns at Passy declined to bend before the Republic, and therefore by the high hand the convent school was closed. Consolata had to bid good-bye to the

Mother Superior and to Mother Agnes-Marie, her model and idol, and quit the haven where for ten years she had rested like a beautiful yacht embayed. Guarded home to London, four months ago, by Cousin Archange, she has had so little time, even to know again in full the family legend, her father's pompous pride, and the quaint affection of Bonne.

Thus Consolata is new to the outer world. Of wooing and coquetry she knows nothing, but of romance she knows by nature, and Dick Stewart has come into her life as a shining figure of romance. Reverent passion, constancy, and effort even in agony seem to her to manifest the very spirit of romantic affection, and these Dick Stewart has shown: proudly her thoughts go winging towards her wounded knight at the Maison within the charmillé.

Yet she must not think of him thus, she knows; she does not love him, she must not permit herself to love him, it is out of the question that she should. He is a steward, and she herself. . . . Pride and sorrow join as she thinks of her rank. But that would count for little, the wounded knight is noble and gentle, though he may be only a steward. What counts with Consolata is her father's wish and command.

Mother Agnes-Marie has taught her that two careers alone are lawful for a girl; either to vow herself to the Virgin, with the veil or without it, or in candour and confidence to give herself to the husband her parents appoint. The convent training has prepared her for either, it has kept stainless the mirror of her mind, it has also made her prematurely but exquisitely a woman, a proud calm finished woman, fit for the family *foyer* or the worldly *salon*. It is the second destiny which she is to fulfil; she is to accept with candour and confidence the appointed hand. M. de Grandemaison her father has spoken; she is not yet affianced, but she is promised, she knows. She does not question the fitness of that, she does not allow herself to ask herself whether she can love the Comte or not; she is French, and French girls do not put such

questions, she has been told. M. de Grandemaison has spoken, and she will obey.

Yet she sighs as she arouses ; a harsh voice has aroused her, a peacock is screaming a request for more food. She shows him the empty basket, and then she smiles a little, for she seems to hear Cousin Archange saying, "I think I hear the peacocks—I feel sure I hear the peacocks!" and that is a useful phrase of his. Cousin Archange has told her of King George the Third, how, recovering from his utter madness, but crazy still, he was shown to his faithful subjects at an Opening of Parliament ; how he read the King's Speech from the Throne, but at the end of every phrase added the word "peacocks." As thus : "My lords and gentlemen peacocks ; My relations v i foreign Powers are now peaceful peacocks. The estimates for the year will be laid before you peacocks!" The Lord Chancellor, keeper of the King's conscience, whispered, "Peacocks is an excellent word, your Majesty, but the King of Prussia never lets his subjects hear him say it. King, always whisper that word," and so King George whispered it, to the end.

Consolata, looking at the peacocks and their hundred eyes ashine like stars in purple gloom, is thinking of M. de Grandemaison. For M. de Grandemaison peacocks—even this loving and dutiful daughter must confess to herself that her father peacocks ; and peacocks overmuch now that he inhabits Château Royal. Usually it is only ludicrous of him, but sometimes in the hearing of strangers it is dangerous ; and then : "I think I hear the peacocks," Cousin Archange has to hint. Consolata flushes as she thinks of that. "Poor father, poor dear, he has been wronged so!" she thinks, with pride and tender pity ; the history of the Grandemaïsons makes her tender with her father when he is most foolish, and keeps her gently proud. She knows that her father knows that he peacocks overmuch ; and that he should know it and yet do it, and not resent a warning not to do it, seems terribly pathetic to his child.

M. de Grandemaison has peacocked so much more than he used to do, since he came to Château Royal. He is so

proud of Château Royal ; to dwell in it so realizes a part of his life's longing, for Château Royal is noble and beautiful, and it is in France. Consolata understood this feeling of her father's, but Cousin Archange . . . she hardly knows what to think of Cousin Archange. He does not seem to be proud and happy with dwelling at Château Royal. Cousin Archange is so strange. If he were not a priest she would almost think that he . . . but no, she will *not* think that !

"Poor père, poor dear !" She had dreaded her father's going to Château Royal. She had feared it might unbalance him, as indeed it had done. That was why she knelt in the old red church, tearful, the telegram in her hand. She had offered that summons and her obedience to it votively. She remembers the telegram, needlessly vague in its terms, written in English so that the French telegraph-clerk should not intelligently read it ; written in cryptic English so that the London telegraph-clerk should not understand. She had offered it at the altar, as the outward and manifest witness of her devotion and filial love ; she had offered it at the altar, she had offered it and left it there.

And then the altar had rejected it—the altar must have done ! Perhaps that was a sign, that she was not to be allowed to renounce ? Some breath from the altar, rejecting it, must have borne it to her English lover's feet. For he would never have dared to lift and rob it from the altar steps !

Yes, the altar had rejected her vow ; and suddenly at that thought she burns with a sense of warmth and happiness. . . . Yet she must keep the vow all the same. She will obey her father, she will wed the Comte. . . .

But there is no need for her to think of that just now—she will not let herself think of it any more. She will put such thoughts away, she will warn Bonne again ; Bonne must not talk to her of the—the steward. It is only Bonne who puts the thoughts of him into her mind. Bonne often spoke of him before, but it hardly mattered then. Now, however, it matters much, because he has come. He has come to her, he has sought and found her, he is her knight ;

her face suffuses as she whispers to herself, "Yes, he has come!"

Then she taps her foot on the stone flooring of the bench. No, she will *not* think of him! She will caution Bonne, Bonne must not talk of him. And as soon as he can be moved. . . .

She will think of her father again—she tries to think of her father—but somebody near her is trying to make her think of her knight. Some one seems to be speaking of him; there is no audible voice, however, and the heat has made all things still. The charmille is still, the flowers are asleep, the lawns lie dreaming, the rich bloom of the peacocks' foliage is strewn in sleep at her feet, her little hidden feet. She has bowed her head and shut her eyes; she is almost asleep herself. That is why some one seems to be speaking to her, for phantoms approach us best when our eyes are closed. Some one who seems to be sitting beside her, murmuring to her, nestling with her, here on the banc de Julie. . . .

No, it is not *he*—he is lame, he is the prisoner of his lameness in the Maison, it could not be he. The some one who seems to be sitting beside her is a girl.

A girl of a woman like herself, but strangely clad. A woman of a girl, who wears a coif and a ruff and a long close sheath of a gown, of very antique fashion. The coif is edged with minever, the stiff ruff is veiled by lace of gold thread and seed-pearls. The ruff leaves the lovely bosom bare, and there, lifted and falling there, a jewel sparkles that is fit for a Queen's delight. "Think of him," this girl of a woman seems to be murmuring to the woman of a girl. "Remember his brave love for you! Renounce him? Nonsense, child! Nothing in the world is so well worth having as love, a brave man's love! Name, reputation, a sceptre, the world itself well lost for love! Believe me, child, for I know!"

For Henri Quatre loved her, she seems to be whispering; he loved her better than the rest. After her there were others, but she it was whom he loved best of all. He

married her ; with the left hand, it is true, but with the right hand he could not. For he was a king. And she was only a Baron's daughter. Her father would have had her wed their neighbour, the Viscomte, she is whispering. But her Henri saw her at Amboise, and she gave herself to his arms. Brave arms they were in battle, and fond arms in peace. This château was built for her, she whispers, and they hid their happiness here amidst forests and hills. Henri dubbed their little son a knight in his cradle, and made him the Marquis d'On.

To the dreaming eyes this visitant from the past seems real ; the visitant casts the long flow of her wing-shaped sleeves upon her knees and clasps her hands upon it. Ah, the long weeks of waiting, here,—here, with her women, and the men-at-arms to guard her and her child, and the old seneschal and Captain so gentle and grim ! And then the new shining out of the sun ! Henri would announce his coming, the swift messenger would warn her, she would wait on the terrace and see him riding in under the gatehouse ; and then she would put her foot upon his in the stirrup, and be caught up to him, and be crushed in his arms, so fierce and hurting, but so yearning with love.

"Yes—love, child ! Do *not* renounce ! Disobey your father, as I did. Think of your English lover every minute, child. The English are brave knights, I have seen them often, they are gallant in the tourney and true in the bower. Think of him always, girl, as I did of mon Henri, mon Roy."

That vision passes ; the sea-shell face droops lower, the beautiful arms have fallen into the white lap. And now another voice is speaking ; not whispering, but commanding. A woman, not a girl of a woman, but ripe and forceful, seems to stand beside Consolata, and to command ; a woman in the pride and heyday of her years, tall, masterful, and splendid. Her powdered hair is high upcoiled, a brooch of gems is blazing in it, a tiny black patch draws the eye to a strong but dimpled chin, an oval patch heaves with the lift of a dazzling breast, a Watteau fan hangs at the full girdle, the brocaded skirts fall in noble curves, the mittened hands

clasp an ebony walking-staff, and—surely this must be Madame Julie, la Lionne herself? This is the very picture of that portrait which hangs in Consolata's room, the room that used to be Madame Julie's, the room with the windows which open on the terrace: often at night in that room Consolata has thought of her.

And now she is here. She speaks commandingly, "Go to him, pretty fool! Go to him at night, in the moonlight, as I went to my Alain Leu! . . . Nay, come to him now—it is daylight, but what matter?" She seems to grip the passive hand, to draw the girl to her feet, and lead her. . . .

Then there is silence again, the hot and sunlit silence. The gorgeous birds have closed all their emerald and sapphire eyes; grasshoppers leap and chirp, gilded little beetles climb the grass-bents and fall; cicadas, drunken with sunshine, sway on the twigs and creak out their saw-like cry; steady and stirless is the hot and brilliant air. . . .

The eyes of violet sapphire open slowly; Consolata stirs, gazes strangely, shivers, wonders, and shivers again. She is alone on the banc de Julie; the girl of a woman is no longer there, Madame Julie was not really there; Consolata has dreamed it all, she knows. She closes her eyes again, as if to recapture her dreams; such dreams! Then suddenly a blush that is hotter than summer daylight and redder than winter sunset burns upon her face, suffuses her, covers her, dyes all her inner whiteness. Yes, she was dreaming! And such dreams! . . .

XXVI

AT a quarter-past three o'clock that afternoon the ingenious Pied-de-nez and the faithful Jawohl went slinking past the château archway ; on the look-out for the Highly Generous, it would appear. The shadow of the gatehouse cast a bluish tinge upon the drive, but burning amber light fell in through the opening, and the deep-set eyes of the vagrant gleamed as they glanced aside. They glanced towards the spot where, at the edge of the *charmille* beyond the garden, a white gown shone like cloth of gold ; they glanced aside at the terrace, where they saw M. de Grandemaison ; M. de Grandemaison, pompously seated at his table under his awning, on the terrace of his château. A board and set of chessmen rested on the table, a small brass key and a file lay beside them, and a dish of small white grapes stood at hand.

M. de Grandemaison's way of sitting was a pompously upright way of sitting, and his fingers positively seemed to patronize the grapes which they touched. Magnificent M. de Grandemaison ! The noble assumption of his port and mien ! And yet, after all, the humility of his pride ! "I am mortal," M. de Grandemaison's manner seemed to say, as he uttered his sonorous cough. "Strange as it may seem, I am—ah—subject to human infirmities, and therefore, on the respectful recommendation of my family chaplain and physician, I—ah—medicinally patronize this fruit !"

Mysteriously pompous M. de Grandemaison ! He has suffered a great wrong—he has been much wronged—as you have read. But *what* great wrong ? To view him patronizing the grape-cure was to doubt that so fine a

personage could ever have suffered any indignity at all. Except for a detail or two M. de Grandemaison's appearance was magnificent. His flannel suit might have been a shade whiter, perhaps, but so might Napoleon Bonaparte's at St. Helena; no doubt a whitish flannel suit, even in August, was not the most appropriate costume that a Corsican Usurper or a M. de Grandemaison could wear. Then M. de Grandemaison had a small chin, that immersed itself in a large double chin, very billowy and prominent. Had he worn a beard, had the beard been long and white and silky, had his fat white hands shining with rings stroked the sumptuous flow of it down upon his prominent waistcoat, from the collar to the middle button, that might have added to the majesty of M. de Grandemaison's appearance a little, perhaps. But he bore himself grandly enough as he was. Portly and pompous and grandiose, M. de Grandemaison seemed to occupy the whole terrace as well as own it; much more aptly than the Comte d'Ou, M. de Grandemaison might have been asked his price for the church and hotel at Provenchel. For sitting on the terrace of his château, under his awning, in his lordly way, M. de Grandemaison seemed to patronize not only the grape-cure and the château, but the Limousin, all France, and in fact the Universe itself.

And yet, when M. de Grandemaison, dropping the empty stem of what had been a bunch of grapes into a silver dish, fastidiously wiped his fat white fingers with fine linen; when he fiddled awhile with a problem on the chess-board, took up the key and the file for a moment, and then chose to clasp his hands upon the convex curve of his waistcoat, lean forward a little, incline his head to the right, shut his eyes, and meditate; his eyes beneath their flickering lids began to perceive a series of past vicissitudes amazing for a Grandemaison—a long panorama or procession of wrongs more in number than could be counted on his polished finger-nails twice over. For nothing in M. de Grandemaison's life so far had realized his rights for him, or given him his born belongings in any full degree. If M. de Grandemaison was . . . and it was not because his

wrongs had now been righted ; he was grand by an inner and inherited grandeur, in spite of all.

Musing, his flickering eyes beheld the doors of the Past stand open, and, gazing through, they saw an irregular dark-red smear congealing upon an elevated floor. Some of the dark-red liquid oozes, drops down between coarse planks to the sanded ground below ; he could hear it drip and drip, though all around a shattering roll of drums was sounding, and the growl and hullabaloo of a wild-beast roar. . . .

M. de Grandemaison frowned, and then shuddered. In that began the long series of the Grandemaison wrongs. The brooding eyes looking into the Past beheld a sire and a grandsire robbed, rebuffed, and rejected, when they claimed their rights amidst public laughter—the brutal laughter of the blockhead who does not and could not understand. Looking nearer the present, the brooding eyes beheld M. de Grandemaison himself, as a boy, a boy who must dwell in a common old house on the edge of a Dutch canal. The brooding eyes behold a particular dark night settle on the canal, like despair on stagnant hope. Then a splash ! . . . The brooding eyes behold again a dripping mass borne into the old house, and a wail goes up in the gloom. Hopeless of attaining his rights, and maddened by his jeered-at wrongs, M. de Grandemaison's father had drowned himself in the dark canal. . . .

M. de Grandemaison drew forth a gold box with a miniature on the lid of it, and took snuff. M. de Grandemaison was not particularly fond of snuff, but snuff-taking is a dignified thing to do when you have a gold box, set with a miniature and diamonds, to tap upon before you aspire the yellow powder ; and all the Messieurs de Grandemaison for two centuries had taken snuff in their day. Whenever the present M. de Grandemaison felt affected by emotion he took snuff ; whenever he took snuff he sneezed ; and then he uttered, louder than ever, his pompous and dignified cough.

The brooding eyes began to see again ; M. de Grandemaison, looking into the more immediate past, beheld himself earning a living. A Grandemaison earning a living ? Discreditable thing, which no Grandemaison had

ever done before! Serfs and farmers had supported the elder Messieurs de Grandemaison—believers in their rights and pitiers of their wrongs had supported the latest sire and grandsire. But now the young Grandemaison who dwelt in the common old house beside the canal must support himself, his mother, and his younger brother, who was to become the father of Abbé Archange. So there, in the more immediate past, M. de Grandemaison beheld himself as a young man bent at a bench, over a small rapid wheel that glitters at its rotating edge. And he feels again that sensation of pleasure, strange and discreditable in a Grandemaison, which comes with increasing earnings, the reward of increasing skill.

Next M. de Grandemaison beholds himself in a condition of prostration upon a heaving expanse of planks; he is crossing the sea towards England. A diamond-dealer called Knibbs, of Hatton Garden in London, requires the services of an honest and expert diamond-cutter and polisher, and for that base mechanic purpose has hired the services of M. de Grandemaison himself. Again in a common old house M. de Grandemaison must dwell, for many years to be a denizen of Hatton Garden; marrying the only child of Mr. Knibbs, dealer; at forty years old succeeding to the business and the old door-plate, and then slowly accumulating gain. At memories like these, what wonder if M. de Grandemaison now proudly and offendedly frowned. With an air of waving all that into oblivion he flicked his handkerchief, after taking snuff.

The blinking eyes next beheld a dying wife and a newborn daughter, the second child, his consolation; and then through a blur they saw his son, his eldest-born, lie dead; the heir and pride and hope of the Grandemaisons has been reft away and then cast up by London river—swollen, discoloured, horrible, but his son, the flesh of his flesh, his only son! And at these pictures edged with black the proud old eyes gazed through tears.

Then they beheld M. de Grandemaison at sixty-four years of age gathering together his gains and quitting England, purchasing a calm old house in a lovely realm of summer, and assuming the pomp and dignity of life

at the château. His smile at this seems to us more pathetic even than his tears. For this, the château, the hidden magnificence, the passing summer days and the hurrying end, are to be the best realization of the eternal Grandemaison dream and ever-hopeful vision; though only a makeshift and puny simulacrum of the ideal.

M. de Grandemaison stirred, leaned back as far as dignity would permit, and coughed; not a sonorous cough this time, but the cough of a man too proud to sob or sigh. He looked around him at the château—*his* château, that once had been a King's. He gazed along his terrace and across his lawns, to where he could see his daughter's gown shine white in the green shadow of his charmillé. He thought of her with affection, if with disappointment. If any girl in the world ought to have been a son and not a daughter, it was she. That the Grandemaïsons were left without an heir, except for Archange, who, foolish hothead! had taken irretrievable vows, was a matter of intense surprise to M. de Grandemaison every time he thought of it. It seemed to him impossible that a male line so long and distinguished and necessary as that of the Grandemaïsons should die out; hardly could he recognize the truth of the fact, no matter how often he considered it. But Consolata must marry, and marry a descendant of the old French noblesse; the Comte d'Ou was not a Hercules or an Adonis—M. de Grandemaison squared his shoulders and took his most magnificent pose—but the Comte d'Ou had Royal blood in his veins; descended from Henri Quatre, the Vicomte would be the fittest mate for Consolata that M. de Grandemaison was likely to be able to afford. And suddenly M. de Grandemaison's eyes were wet, and through a brief tear he saw the vision of a little son again—a grandson—heir of his house, successor to the grandeur of the Grandemaïsons. As for that ancient law which barred such a succession, why—bah! What use to be a Grandemaison if one could not dispense with, waive, overrule an ancient Law?

M. de Grandemaison's attitude was now an almost Royal p. 10. Ah well, he had not done so badly after all. Charged

and rigid with due dignity he preened himself in his own eyes ; as the pigeons on the roof behind him were doing just then.

No man could have a daughter more graceful and sweet and dear than Consolata, he knew. And—waiving that old Law—a future Marquis d'Ou should be the head and front of the old lineage de Grandemaison. Perhaps it was for the best that Archange should have put himself out of the succession. Impracticable Archange—always dreaming of the spiritual arm, Archange—an idealist, unpractical, and insufficiently a Grandemaison, Archange. Looking down at his feet, M. de Grandemaison's eyes of hope and faith saw a baby Grandemaison playing there, and he muttered, "At least he shall have a title and a château."

It was a quarter to four by the clock in the tower on the stables when Pied-de-nez, retracing his steps for the fourth time, went slinking past the arch again ; he flashed his glance through the opening, and saw that a white old man had come out upon the terrace. The faithful Tronk was bowing before his master, and presenting to him a Panama hat and an incongruous tasselled cane. At ten minutes to four M. de Grandemaison had risen, had donned the hat and grasped the cane, had descended the three shallow steps from the terrace, and was beginning his progress towards the charmille. Preceded by Tronk, M. de Grandemaison went slowly, in solemn and ceremonious silence, being pompously under way for the Maison de Julie, to patronize a guest. "An interesting young sir—quite a young man of—ah—quality, it would appear," M. de Grandemaison was thinking good-naturedly. "Archange reports of him favourably, through Tronk. There can be no—ah—necessity for suspicion. He is English, as we thought. Name of—diable m'emporte si je me rappelle son nom !—ah yes, name of Stewart, it seems. Good family, the Stewarts. Yes, Stewart is the name. From the first we remarked his—ah—distinction. Yes, yes, our unfailing eye. . . ."

M. de Grandemaison peacocked, casting his head back, his waistcoat forward, and his coat-tails out like fans ;

concealed on the bench in the hollow of the gateway arch, Pied-de-nez sardonically watched M. de Grandemaison go peacocking along.

M. de Grandemaison went with a tiptoeing gait, the cane magnificently swung and the jewelled knob of it displayed. M. de Grandemaison went in pomp, preceded by his bending and balancing valet with hands upraised and a mien of awe. M. de Grandemaison went with steps wonderfully light for his weight, though he knew that the sanded drive would be proud to receive the patronage of his heaviest tread. Yet M. de Grandemaison had never read in Pascal that because we wish people to think us more important than we are we endeavour to seem what they are inclined to think us ; M. de Grandemaison's aim was higher and less exterior than that ; M. de Grandemaison wished to appear that which he knew himself to be. He went with measured step and magnificent gait because it was his family duty to do that ; haste is undignified and indecorous even when needful, and a running peacock looks absurd.

But, slowly though he walked, M. de Grandemaison perspired, for he was portly, not to say corpulent, and in the Limousin the daylight still shone hotly. So M. de Grandemaison paused in the shadow of the charmille, and coughed. "Tronk, our handkerchief !" The faithful Tronk produced a piece of silk, lace-edged ; and rolling it into a ball M. de Grandemaison dabbed it upon his forehead, in the most dignified way by which such an act of the toilet can be done ; a stately way hereditary with the stout Grandemaissions for nearly two hundred years. Then, with the handkerchief unrolled and debonairly depending from his fingers, M. de Grandemaison resumed his progress. His cane now struck the gravel of the shadowed walk ; one, two—one, two—one, two !

In advance, but keeping himself near the edge of the path, so that his discreetly bowed shoulders and balancing back might not offend his master's immediate view, went Tronk, discreetly fine in a morning livery. The cloth of the livery was thick, but Tronk did not permit himself to perspire and need a handkerchief—no hereditary manservant ever does. Tronk was cool, Tronk was as cool as a

cucumber or even cooler ; it is true that Tronk was spare and scraggy, as well as very white and old.

Tronk regretted his leanness ; Tronk would have preferred to resemble his master in figure ; the realized wish Tronk would have been a girth like that of the Lord Mayor of London's coachman himself. But Tronk made up for slightness of waistcoat by importance of gait. If M. de Grandemaison approached the gate of the Maison garden with pompous step, Tronk's was now the march of a Pompilius. For Tronk had a pedigree, too ; Tronk had been born in the garret of the old house beside the Dutch canal ; Tronk's father had served the Grandemaïsons, and to serve the Grandemaïsons seemed to Tronk an ennobled task. Tronk was proud of his pedigree in valettry, and he had hopes of further ennoblement ; if Bonne the house-keeper could be promoted from the kitchen, why might not the valet aspire ? . . .

Meanwhile, with all the pride in the world he held back the gate of the little idle garden, unnecessarily drew in his body to widen the pass, and in a herald's voice commanded attention : " Attention ! M. de Grandemaison comes ! "

One, two—one, two—the clouded cane with the jewelled knob and the gold-lace tassel struck the garden walk. Majestically M. de Grandemaison advanced. Sweet odours saluted him, flowers shone for him, boughs cast shade for him, as visible seigneur and owner and lord. The Abbé rose to honour, salute, and receive him ; the guest would have risen also, but " No, Stewart, lie still ! " the Abbé said, pressing him back into the chair.

" Sir," said the Abbé, " let me present to you Mr. Francis Benedick Stewart—you will not require him to rise, I am sure ? " And indeed the handkerchief had already waved the guest into the chair again. Standing within the portico, prominent, imposing, urbane, his left hand still waving, his waistcoat thrown forward, and his right hand on the flashing knob of the cane which he used as a stay, M. de Grandemaison put his nose in air, closed his eyes, and spoke.

" Young sir, do not rise. We do not—ah—desire you

to arise," said he, and instantly Dick Stewart recognized the voice. It was the voice of Mr. Knibbs, Dealer,—the voice which the phonograph at Mr. Pratt's office in Theobald's road had recorded; and now as he heard it Dick Stewart listened for a background of whirring and wheezing sound.

"It is too good of you, sir," Dick Stewart said, and again attempted to rise.

But M. de Grandemaison proudly waved him down. "We may make : exception, don't you think, Archange?" he said, shutting his eyes again. "We are not—ah—unreasonable, we recognize that there are cases and—ah—occasions. . . . Be seated, young sir,—in fact, resume—ah—your reclining attitude. We trust that your foot is now better, and also your—ah—general health. Replace your limb beneath that—ah—beneficent fountain." Dick Stewart smiled at that name for a filter. "The body, young sir—medical prescriptions, the laws of—ah—pathology, don't you call it, Archange?—yes, pathology, young sir—are above all, for the time. Yes, maugrebleu! Tronk, a chair! We will be seated ourself."

"I almost think I hear the peacocks," said the Abbé.

"Do you—*do* you, Archange?" Hurriedly M. de Grandemaison said that, opening his eyes, and sinking down upon the Abbé's chair. "Peacocks are noisy birds—noisy birds, Archange." He waved the handkerchief fanningly, and perspired. "Tronk,—retire!"

Then, clasping his hand upon the middle part of his waistcoat's curve, M. de Grandemaison coughed, leaned forward a little, held his head a trifle aside, and under flickering eyelids sent a critical gaze at Dick Stewart.

Dick Stewart returned the gaze. He saw a loosely-clad, very heated old gentleman with a shaven and powdered face that was pinkish over the cheekbones; an expanse of double chin, a heavy underlip, a prominent nose, a forehead sloping up into baldness, shallow round eyes of a pallid blue, and thick black eyebrows. "If *this* is her father," Dick Stewart thought, "how beautiful her mother must have been!"

Importantly her father spoke,—patronizingly, his nose lifted and his eyes shut again.

"We desire to set you at your ease, young sir. You will be—ah—naturally uneasy, because you have come to our château under circumstances which may be considered—ah—exceptional circumstances. *Mauvregleu*, yes! Exceptional, don't you think, *Archange*?"

"But I am glad of them, sir!" said the Abbé, standing by in a deferential attitude. "Mr. Stewart and I discover that we have a mutual friend in London. We are becoming friends ourselves."

"Oh, indeed—ah—are you?" M. de Grandemaison looked at Dick Stewart less patronizingly. "Mr.—ah—Stewart, under these circumstances we will—ah—consider you as our guest; for such a period of time as your lameness may—ah—necessitate. But under these circumstances, some account of your—ah—antecedents might perhaps. . . . Don't you think so, *Archange*? Mr.—ah—Mr.—ah——"

"Stewart," said the guest, rather curtly.

"I thank you, young sir," said M. de Grandemaison magnificently. "Mr.—ah—Stewart is English, don't you think, *Archange*? To come from England is a passport, young sir. We have ourself experienced—ah—kindness from your noble nation in our exile."

"I am certain I hear the peacocks," the Abbé said, and again the handkerchief fanned the hot face of M. de Grandemaison. "Did I—ah—betray anything, *Archange*?" his eyes seemed to say, as they rolled themselves in his face towards the Abbé.

The Abbé understood. "Only a word, sir," he said. "I dare say that Mr. Stewart will answer any questions?"

"Delighted! Anxious to do so, point of fact." Dick Stewart moved. "Sir, I wish you would let me rise?" *Her father*, he was thinking—*her father*, again.

"No, no—no, indeed! We could not think of it!" M. de Grandemaison beamed, magnificent once more. "The—ah—occasion justifies some lack of—ah—ceremonial, *Archange*, don't you think?" Then he smiled.

"That good amusing Bonne! To inform us that you were a steward! We cannot—ah—imagine why? Archange, why should that good amusing Bonne suppose that our young guest here is a steward?"

"She would mishear the name, sir," the Abbé said drily.

"Perhaps so—yes, no doubt of it! Ah yes, Steward and Stewart," said M. de Grandemaison beamingly. "Stewart is a good name, young sir. Any—ah—particular Stewart, are you? A Stewart of—ah—pedigree?"

Dick Stewart reddened a little. Then, "I believe so, sir," he said simply. "If it wasn't for the omission of a marriage ceremony a long time ago my name would have been spelt Stuart."

"Ah!" said M. de Grandemaison. "Continue, young sir."

"My great-great-grandfather was born in the Holy Apostle palace at Rome, I'm told," Dick Stewart went on, reluctantly.

"Yes?" said M. de Grandemaison, inquiringly and encouragingly.

"He was born in . . ." Dick Stewart hesitated . . . "the household of that particular Stuart of pedigree who was known, sir, as the Young Pretender."

"Ah!" said M. de Grandemaison. "You hear, Archange?" He coughed with more than usual solemnity, and then there was quite a long silence.

"Indeed!" said M. de Grandemaison, presently. "Very remarkable! A sufficiently good—ah—pedigree, Mr. Stewart. If you have proofs?"

"Sir?" It was the Abbé's protest.

"Why not, indeed?" said M. de Grandemaison hotly. "You forget yourself, Archange! Do you set—ah—limits to our right to—ah—interrogate? A gentleman always has his proofs."

"Not here at any rate, sir," Dick Stewart said. "Except this ring, perhaps." He touched the intaglio of the lion-rampant.

"Ah," said M. de Grandemaison, looking at a signet on his own very white plump hand.

"I shouldn't have mentioned it, sir—I don't brag. In fact, it's nothing to brag of——"

"Unless we had asked you, I am sure you wouldn't, Stewart!" the Abbé said. "Sir"—he addressed M. de Grandemaison—"need we ask any more? Mr. Stewart remains here for twenty-four hours only—merely till his ankle is stronger. Is there need for more?"

M. de Grandemaison rose. "You forget yourself, Archange," he said again. "It is not your place to—ah—put limits, as we have before said, to Mr. Stewart's stay. A descendant of the—ah—Royal Stuarts is welcome here. He is the guest of ourself!" Again M. de Grandemaison peacocked. "You will stay with *us*, Mr. Stewart. An ancestor of yours was the guest of an ancestor of ours. You will consider yourself our honoured visitor, Mr. Stewart. Doubtless you will wish to send for—ah—your valet?"

"I should like to wire to Limoges for my car, sir, if you don't mind?"

"Most certainly we do not mind, Mr. Stewart. Prepare the telegram. Tronk shall despatch it." M. de Grandemaison's eyes had closed again, and his big nose was high in air. "Let us see, let us see," he went on fussily, opening his eyes to regard Dick Stewart with a kind of benevolent pity. "Mr. Stewart, in twenty-four hours, which will be at—ah——" he looked at his splendid old watch—"at exactly twenty minutes past four o'clock to-morrow, we shall—ah—receive you at the château. Do not forget, Mr. Stewart—at twenty minutes past four o'clock. Prepare the telegram, Mr. Stewart. . . . Ah yes, that is it,—exactly! *Tronk!*" The faithful Tronk approached. "We prepare to depart, Tronk. You will despatch this telegram immediately. . . . Archange will bring you to-morrow, Mr. Stewart. . . . Till to-morrow, Mr. Stewart!" And then, a thing he had seldom been known to do before, M. de Grandemaison actually lifted his hat!

His guest jumped up, to bow. With a deprecating motion of the hand, and magnificently bowing in return,

M. de Grandemaison descended the steps of the portico in grandeur ; and imposingly—for even the back of M. de Grandemaison was imposing—he departed, preceded by the faithful Tronk. Tap, tap—one, two—one, two ; the cane sounded fainter and fainter, as in puzzlement deeper than ever Dick Stewart stared at the Abbé Archange.

XXVII

MEANWHILE, having seen M. de Grandemaison set sail like a galleon, the ingenious Pied-de-nez propped the trusty Jawohl against the inner wall of the gateway, curled himself up on the bench there, and comfortably watched the château door. And presently he saw the "ugly angry one" come out upon the terrace, a dishful of grapes and a serviette in her hands. These she placed on the table; she carried away the dish which had rested there previously, and then she returned to the terrace with a long broom in her hands. She began to sweep the floor beneath the awning; vigorously she swept, and even viciously, as if hard sweeping would relieve her mind. Then, heated and somewhat tired, she let herself down upon the topmost step, at the level of the terrace, drew up her purple skirt a little, revealing a starched petticoat punctured with embroidered holes, placed the broomstick across her angular knees, and sat thinking.

She knew that M. de Grandemaison had gone to the Maison de Julie, to patronize the "steward"; and a good deal depended on that. If only M. de Grandemaison would not be too peacocky! If only he would be as nice to the nice young gent as he ought to! "Why shouldn't Seer ask him to stop a bit—a week, say? Why shouldn't M. Arkans ask him? I s't' think Mr. Arkans can see as he's a nice young gent, first off! It wants some'dy nice here for my beauty, that's all!"

Bonne rolled the broom upon her knees, and critically regarded the bristles part of it. "These foreign things!" she thought contemptuously. "Don't suppose as you *can* buy a real good broom over here—these Frenchies don't understand how to make 'em." She put her elbows on

her knees, and her chin upon her joined hands. Swaying herself to and fro, she began to muse upon the past, as M. de Grandemaison had so lately done. She recalled her own first going to the old house in Hatton Garden, six and thirty years before, as "general." Proudly she thought of the affection which grew up between herself and the young missus—Miss Ellen, only child of Mr. Knibbs, dealer, the real Mr. Knibbs. "Ah, her were as good as good, *and* as pretty, were Miss Elling!" Then the "young man from Amsterdam" came to the house in Hatton Garden, to work and to live in it, "and anybody might ha' told what'd happen next! Very miscelever at cutting di'monds, he were—old Mr. Knibbs always said so. And very sharp on marry-ing my first precious, *and* the business! Though if *I* could have had *my* way her wouldn't never have mismarried him, that's all! . . . Not as I'm saying as he weren't good-looking and fine-appearing and high manners and all that! But always that stuck-up about what he'd ought to be if rights was rights it weren't bearable! The way he come it over old master and my first precious! Ah, her misrued the day afore her died!

"Not as it were *his* fault—I'm not saying as he weren't pretty good—for a man—take him all together. If he hadn't sent my beauty away to convints and places I wouldn't bear him no grudges, that's all. He was that cut up when my first precious died as he couldn't abear the baby, though he *did* call her Consolater! And then when poor young Master Charley Louey was misdrowned I thought he'd ha' gone mad quite awful! . . . No, I'm not saying as he didn't have his natural affections, though peacocky. And he's riz me up, *I will* say that for him—it isn't many masters 'd have made me what I'm now. Dressing me up and living me in a Royal Shatter—and never a misword, mind you, nor a look as wasn't all right! Faithful he's been to my poor dear first precious, *I will* say that, any day, and never no need for the broom. . . .

"Only, he's a Cathlick, and I don't hold with Roaming Cathlicks, nor never shall, that's all! I'm a Free Methodist, and always was and shall be, like my poor mother afore me, *and* my poor father: old Mister Knibbs and my first

precious, they was Free Methodists too. And how her could marry a Roaming, and them let her, *I* don't understand nor never shan't, that's all ! ”

At this point Bonne felt an attraction, lifted her eyes, gazed towards the archway, and perceived Pied-de-nez. “Scat ! ” she cried, jumping up in a fury and rushing towards him, brandishing the broom. Pied-de-nez grinned till the last minute of security. Then, as the ugly angry one neared him under the arch, Pied-de-nez caught up Jawohl and departed, carrying away his grin. Bonne threw an angry word and the broom after him. The flying broom missed him, of course, for it had been thrown by a woman ; but by some working of the mysterious law of compensation the missile hit Mr. Shott.

Mr. Shott was on the point of paying a call at the château ; Mr. Shott was very peaceably entering the archway at the moment when Pied-de-nez came rushing forth. There are people who tumble easily, who lose their feet at least once a day ; Mr. Shott appeared to be one of them. But there was excuse for him this time. The mad rush of Pied-de-nez and Bonne bewildered him, it was so swift and sudden ; even so does a long-patient dog bolt out at a provoking cat. Jawohl got between Mr. Shott's legs and puzzled him, the flying broom knocked his hat off, and down upon the ground went the ex-policeman, his bag, and his umbrella, once more.

Sitting there, his feet very wide apart, with a bewildered air he looked up at Bonne ; armed with the broom again, and standing over him, threateningly Bonne looked down at him. Another woman might have apologized, but that was never Bonne's way.

“ Now then, you ! What're you going and sitting down here for, that's all ? ” Superbly she demanded it, bewildering him the more.

Mr. Shott had put his finger nails to his hair, and “ Bless yer heart, Mum ! ” he would have uttered, but he had begun to laugh ; wobbling and bubbling with that silent shaking laugh of his, so jolly and infectious — so shook and chuckled and grinned that Bonne herself began to feel merry.

But suddenly his laughter ceased ; he was looking round for his little bag.

"Bedod!" he said solemnly, "good thing there's none of 'em inside him *this time*! I'd ha' had to wash 'em *this time*, as sure as eggs is eggs!"

"Wash what?" said Bonne.

Mr. Shott looked uncomfortable. "Well, you're asking, and I'd ought to tell you, mum, to be Frenchy and polite, but—I'd rather not mention the names. It's summat as I wears sometimes, mum. But it's all right, there won't be no need to wash 'em, no eggs in him *this time*, not so fur as I'm aware."

"Eggs?" cried Bonne. "Well, I declare! What eggs?"

"Hen's eggs," said Mr. Shott. "I never goes in for ducks'!"

"Well, we're not buying any," said Bonne. "We grows our own."

"Then I'll buy some of you, mum," said Mr. Shott promptly. "If they're fresh, that is, d'y'see. How much a dozn, Mum—I'm very fond of 'em when they're fresh."

Bonne looked at him with disdain. "D'y'think we keeps a shop?" she said superbly. "Where's your eyes, man? Can't you see this is a Shatter?"

"I'm aware it is, Mum," said Mr. Shott. "That's why I'm come, d'y'see."

"Go along with you! Sitting there as if it belonged to you! Get up! And don't you Mum me no more, that's all! A single woman *I* am, and always was, thank Evans!"

"Are you, Miss?" Mr. Shott was getting up and dusting himself. "Shouldn't ha' thought it, not to look at you," he added with a gallant smile. "A handsome young woman like you: . . . Though I don't much wonder, if"—he looked at the broom—"if you warms 'em all up with that!"

Then his gaze travelled farther, to the figure of Pied-de-nez, distant but observant on the fringe of the forest. The sight of Pied-de-nez seemed to anger Mr. Shott, and he began to address loud approaches to the chemineau, in a

kind of French that carried. Then, jerking his head towards Pied-de-nez, "Native, isn't he?" said Mr. Shott to Bonne. "Frenchman, as far as I'm aware on. Making love to you, Miss, were he?" Critically he looked at Bonne. "'Stonishing what some Frenchmen 'll do, though. Not going to have him, I s'pose? Wouldn't ha' broomed him if you was. Sing'ler thing, though, me and you, Miss—I'm a single man myself."

"You are, are you? Good thing too!" said Bonne, regarding him with disfavour. "Some poor woman's had a escape, that's all! Now then," she went on, fingering the broom, "what do you expect you're going and doing here? You'd better misunderstand at once as this isn't no public, not if it was ever so! What d'you expect you're going and wanting on these premises, that's all?"

"Well, I'm not going and wanting no assault and battery, not with brooms, Miss," said Mr. Shott. "Not so far as I'm aware on, that is."

"You'd better go and be off, then!" said Bonne. "Trespassers is severely prosecuted on these premises, that's all." She looked across to the edge of the forest, and shook her broom at Pied-de-nez. Then, recovering arms, so to speak, she fondled her weapon and frowned at Mr. Shott.

"Bedod, Miss," said he, "you don't give no very warm welcomes, do you, bless your heart! Can't you see as I'm English? And you're English yourself, too, bless your heart!"

"Don't you go blessing my heart like that!" cried Bonne. "Such stuff! Of course I'm English—always was and always will be, please 'Evans!"

"Then I'm right!" cried Mr. Shott. "I thought I was, and that feller yonder's a liar, so far as I'm aware! Right *this* time, anyhow—I've found the darmed place at last!"

"What place?" asked Bonne.

"Chatter Doo—this *is* Chatter Doo, isn't it?"

"Well, and supposing it were, what then, that's all!"

"I've come to see Mr. Knibbs, if you please, Miss."

"Mr. Knibbs? What Mr. Knibbs?" Bonne said. "Do you suppose we has Mr. Knibbses *here*?"

"Oh yes, you do, bless your heart! Oh yes, you do, Miss, begging your pardon!" said Mr. Shott reproachfully. "No good trying and nutting me off. I don't want to contradict you, Miss, but you shouldn't be telling lies like that! Mr. Knibbs as used to be in Hatting Garding's the gent I mean. Just you think a bit, Miss, and you'll remember, easy—Mr. Knibbs from Hatting Garding, as has come to live in Chatter Doo. We got his address from a 'Merican bloke called Pratt as keeps an office in Tibbald's Road, Holborn. Body did, I mean. Body's my pardner, Miss. I'm in a firm. Take one of our cards, Miss. It's ekity business, Miss." He opened the bag. "I'm come to make somebody disgorge."

Bonne struck down the held-out card. "Disgeorge!" she cried. "What do you mean with your disgeorging? Lookey here?" she went on angrily, "what d'you suppose you're coming here for, disgeorging? This isn't the only Shatter in the country, is it? You go and look for your Knibbses somewhere else! A pardner, are you? Not you! I knows what you are! You're a p'leeceman, *you* are, I knows you by your boots, as wants blacking disgraceful!"

"I'm not!" said Mr. Shott, with sudden heat. "I'm not, Miss, so there now!"

"Metrypolitian, that's what you are! I've had lots like you hanging round many a time. No good you telling me you're not, not if you was to go black in the face with it I wouldn't believe it, your boots betrays you. You go and tell the truth for once! Bobby's your name and Bobby's your nature! As I never could abide having hanging about me, nor wont, so just you be off! And what's more, you're in liquor, too!"

"I'm not intending to contradict, Miss," said Mr. Shott with elaborate politeness, "but I'm *not*! It's a darm lie, I'm *not*! I'm not in no Force nor no liquor, not me, no thenks, I'm a member of a Firm. As has got ekity business. With Mr. Knibbs of Hatting Garding. As used to fence. . . . well, as used to do a bit at . . . well, as used to buy diamants, let's put it that way, d'y'see!"

Bonne brought her broom to the bayonet charge. "Now then!" she said, "you and your di'monds and

disgeorging! If you don't go and be off these premises in two twinkles——"

"Bless your heart, Miss——" The bristles of the broom came charging up at Mr. Shott, but he caught them and held them: then, pushing down the broom and loosing it, he began to laugh.

He laughed so abundantly and absurdly that Bonne had to join in, though tears of anxiety were in her eyes. A loud high cachinnation, the hysterical laughter of Bonne, echoed in the archway; and Pied de-nez, listening from the margin of the forest, grinned like a gargoye himself.

A moment later, Pied-de-nez, looking past these mad English folks through the archway, perceived the stately coming of M. de Grandemaison. Serious, formal, ceremoniously dignified, M. de Grandemaison was returning from his visit of patronage to a guest, and M. de Grandemaison was far from expecting the visit of a Mr. Shott. M. de Grandemaison had almost succeeded in forgetting a certain episode of business in Hatton Garden. Too strictly considered, perhaps, that episode might be considered rather—— . . . But M. de Grandemaison never allowed himself to complete that thought. Business is business; business is business, when it is not bankruptcy or felony. But business for M. de Grandemaison was now a wretched mercenary matter of the past.

M. de Grandemaison approached the terrace, preceded by Tronk, and it was then that the loud high uneasy laughter of Bonne reached the ear. Tronk hastened ahead, to quell it. Tronk signalled to Bonne; if M. de Grandemaison had not been within earshot Tronk would have shouted.

"Hssh!" Tronk hissed as he neared the gateway, "M. de Grandemaison comes."

Sonorously, pompously, and reprovingly M. de Grandemaison coughed.

XXVIII

BONNE turned, to find her master regarding her with severity. She dropped the broom; then she dropped a curtsy; but this did not appease.

"You forget yourself, Madame," M. de Grandemaison said, his chin in the air. "Who is this person you permit to be here?"

Bonne had picked up her broom, and was fiddling with the knob of it.

"A p'leeceman, sir, that's what he is," she said uncomfortably, with a slight return of her uneasy merriment. "I tried to broom him out, but he won't . . . And if it isn't his impidence, I'd like to know what is, that's all!"

"A policeman? A policeman?" Uneasily M. de Grandemaison himself said it, as he eyed Mr. Shott. "What do you—ah—what can be—what is he doing here, do you suppose?"

"Talking about disgeorging is what he's doing here, that's all!" said Bonne, vindictively. "I'll out him now, though, if 'Tronk'll help!"

But Mr. Shott had taken the situation into his own hands.

"Mr. Knibbs, sir, I b'lieve?" he said, advancing, "Mr. Knibbs of Hatting Garding, sir, I b'lieve?"

M. de Grandemaison, assuming his most magnificent pose, regarded Mr. Shott with hauteur.

"There *was* a Mr. Knibbs," he said, "of Hatton Garden. During—ah—a considerable period. But there is no Mr. Knibbs here, my good man. Remove yourself—you intrude!"

"No thanks," said Mr. Shott. "I'm not on duty now, that way. No calling me in to remove myself, or anybody,

now. Now I'm here at last I'm going to do business. Yes, sir, there *were* a Mr. Knibbs, and there *are* a Mr. Knibbs, as once bought a diamant drop in Hatting Garding, as fur as I'm aware on. He bought it orf a party name o' Sneakey, he did—Sneakey, *Sneakey!*" he added, with emphasis, staring at M. de Grandemaison significantly. "Orf a bloke name o' Sneakey, as was a respectable burglar by trade. Bless your heart, sir, Mr. Knibbs, he *offered* to buy it orf Sneakey, he did, and told him where he could get it, too, so there now!"

M. de Grandemaison steadied himself with his cane. "Retire, Madame," he said to Bonne. "Tronk—go away! We will—ah—converse with this person alone."

He waited until Bonne and Tronk had disappeared. Then he slowly ascended the terrace steps. Seating himself in his accustomed place, he beckoned Mr. Shott; taking a bunch of grapes into his right hand and beginning to pluck at them with his left, mechanically, he watched Mr. Shott mount the steps. Then he put out his left hand repressingly.

"There! That is sufficiently near! Now, then"—he looked right and left of him, to be sure that the terrace and drive were empty of listeners—"now then, policeman, what is it you wish to say?"

"I'm not," said Mr. Shott. "I've cut the Force, sir, you understand. This is a bit of ekity business, not Lor. Bless your heart, sir, we're not going to Lor about it, not we—not such fools!"

He set down his bag and umbrella, carried a card to the table, placed the card in front of M. de Grandemaison, and retired to the topmost step.

"We found it out, sir, Body and me did, casual like, Body being a bookie as used to know Sneakey in a friendly way o' business, and visited him when he was put in quod. That was how Sneakey came to tell Body about it, sir. Bless your heart, sir, that diamont drop was worth hundreds, and Sneakey said as how you——"

M. de Grandemaison's sonorous cough and raised hand checked him. "*Who?*" A hard, dry, almost inarticulate word.

Mr. Shott begged pardon. "As how Mr. Knibbs
sir——"

"Ah, that is better, my man. Continue!"

"As how Mr. Knibbs had done business with him afore, buying diamants as Sneakey had bought, honest, of another burgler, but diamants as . . . well, as mightn't be considered as belonging honest to Sneakey, not according to Lor."

M. de Grandemaison reddened. "Not so loud. Come nearer to us!" he said.

"Though considering as how Sneakey had bought all the diamants excep' the diamant drop, afore he sold 'em to Mr. Knibbs, it seems ekity to me as they belonged to Mr. Knibbs honest when he'd bought 'em."

"Pre-cisely," said M. de Grandemaison, assuming an easier air.

"But when it come to the drop, sir, it was different, bless your heart! Sneakey said to Body as Mr. Knibbs of Hatting Garding said to Sneakey as how there was a diamant drop with a pictur' in it, a portrait, as was kept on show in the Museum at Sou' Kensington, sir," Mr. Shott went on. "Told Sneakey the very place where it was kept, he did, and the number of it in the glass case and all. So it wasn't Sneakey's fault if he took it, 'cause he took it on commission, as they say. According to ekity it was Mr. Knibbs' fault, and if things had been ekitable and not Lorful it would ha' been Mr. Knibbs as they'd put in quod. 'Cause Mr. Knibbs of Hatting Garding, he told Sneakey as how he'd give fifty quid for that there diamant drop, he would, any day. Seems to ha' been very fond o' picturs, Mr. Knibbs, sir. People has such fancies sometimes."

M. de Grandemaison crushed a grape between dry lips. "Continue," he said.

"Diamants is diamants, sir. Same as eggs is eggs, so fur as you're aware on. Very fond of eggs myself, but can't afford no diamants. Too dear, d'y'see? Diamants all round a pictur, if it's only a little un, is worth a sight more than fifty quid, any day. Me and Body considers as Sneakey was fair had over that bit o' business, sir. Body

and me considers as he'd ought to ha' had two hundred and fifty quid the very least."

"Pre-posterous!" said M. de Grandemaison. "Besides, there were—ah—private circumstances which——"

"Sneakey was downright honest about it, sir, you understand! Bless your heart, sir, Sneakey never peached, not he! Mr. Knibbs would have been in Queer Street if he had! I'm not denying as Sneakey pinched two or three other things—gold ornaments they was—out of another glass case at the Museum, as used to belong to King Solomon or Jeremiah or somebody as is Scriptural, as Mr. Knibbs didn't commission and wouldn't buy. Only—Body and me thinks it weren't quite ekity, that, 'cause it got Sneakey into quod. Sneakey has to try to put them Solomon's gold ornaments up the spout somewhere else, and he messes it, and the Lor gives him six months. The *Lor*!" Mr. Shott showed a fine contempt. "Does the Lor ever do justice? No, not it, nor ever did, as fur as I'm aware. Quite right to make the Lor blind on monuments—the Lor's always playing blindman's buff an' catching the wrong party! The Lor finds out about them gold ornaments as tempted poor Sneakey, but what's the Lor know about that there diamant drop, or who set Sneakey on to pinch it? And does the Lor find out, and make *him* disgorge? No thenks! Not it, as fur as I'm aware!"

M. de Grandemaison frowned. "Did you—ah—say disgorge?"

"Yes, I did, sir," Mr. Shott went on warmly. "Somebody's got to disgorge, and ekity's got to make him do it. The *Lor* won't! Bless your heart, the Lor's the Lor. If I was in the Force now do you think I'd be here, sir? Not me. Not a bit of it! I'd be arresting some poor chap as had made a slip and couldn't help it. The Lor's holding on to Sneakey and them gold ornaments, but it's letting the chief bloke what had the diamant drop get off gay! It isn't ekity, that, and nobody can argey as it is!"

M. de Grandemaison took up another bunch of grapes, calmly enough, but he sighed.

"Continue!"

"Bless your heart, sir, I'll continue!" Mr. Shott said cheerfully. "I'm meaning to, till ekity's been done. Supposing as that diamant drop's worth five hundred, which is moderate in diamants, and Sneakey only getting fifty for himself, not reckoning in the quod, that leaves four hundred and fifty as ekity says ought to be made up. Well, now, supposing we said a hundred for me, as has come as agent and walking a lot this hot weather, and a hundred for Body as found it out and wrote letters to me about it at Boulogne, and fifty for our exes, which is only fair to be paid. That'll leave two hundred for Sneakey, in consideration of quod, when he comes out, d'y'see, sir? And he's had fifty. Which'll make two fifty for him all together, as a reward. Pretty fair, that, so fur as I can see. It's only ekity as he should lose the gold ornaments, because they was Solomon's or some'dy's, and Mr. Knibbs didn't commission 'em. So it's got to be four-fifty paid up. A fair offer, isn't it, furinstans?"

Mr. Shott was looking at M. de Grandemaison expectantly; M. de Grandemaison had dropped the bunch of grapes into the silver dish. He took up the serviette and fastidiously rubbed his fingers.

"It appears to us that you are—ah—a blackmailer," he said, "Mr.—Mr.—ah, diable m'emporte si je me rappelle votre nom"—he looked at the card—"ah yes, Mr. Shott!"

"Bless you heart, no, sir—not me!" Mr. Shott said cheerfully. "I'm not no blackmailer, nor no red mailer, nor a blue mailer, matter o' that! Come now, sir, I wouldn't make no fuss about it, not if I was you! I'm an agent of ekity, that's what I am, sir. If I've got a c'mission in life it's to see fair. I wouldn't blackmail a brass farden, sir, let alone anything valuable. I've had two or three cases of ekity afore, and I've always seen fair. Mr. Knibbs of Hatting Garding's got the diamant drop, and he's going to pay for it fair, that's the ticket. Simple enough, as fur's I'm aware. He pays me four-fifty, and I pays Sneakey two when he comes out o' quod. You can depend on me, sir, I'm a honest man. That's why I cut the Force. So's Body. So's Sneakey in his way. Never

peached about the drop, Sneakey didn't. He knew Mr. Knibbs of Hatting Garding'd pay up if he didn't!"

M. de Grandemaison coughed. "Mr. ah—Shott, we used to know Mr. Knibbs of Hatton Garden. We knew him well. Perhaps we could—ah—induce him to present you with fifty pounds."

Mr. Shott shook his head. Then he shook it again. He also shook it a third time, violently but cheerfully.

"Might as well offer fifty bob, sir," he said, smiling all the time.

"Mr.—ah—Shott, you are a hypocrite, I fear."

"No, sir. Not me! Not as I'm aware on, that is."

Warmly Mr. Shott denied it, and indeed he was not a hypocrite. Such are the variety and versatility of human nature that there are many millions of self-deceivers but very few hypocrites in the world. Honestly Mr. Shott had persuaded himself that the Law is unjust, that equitable arrangements out of Court provide the only method of obtaining approximate justice, and that persons put in prison are often no less honest than persons who go free. A monstrous error, of course; in courts of law the guilty are always punished and the clean-handed always vindicated, no doubt. But such was Mr. Shott's delusion that he held the opposite view to that, quite sincerely. To Mr. Shott's perverted mind Mr. Shott appeared a minister of true justice; and to receive his reward and the repayment of his expenses when doing justice and loving equity, seemed to him at least as fair as that, under the agis of the Law, there should be barristers' retainers and refreshers, solicitors' charges, and Court officers' fees. Mr. Shott's sincerity was soon to be made manifest, indeed; for M. de Grandemaison's next utterance tested and vindicated it.

"You speak of equity, my man. You appear to possess a poor—ah—opinion of the Law. There is, we believe, in your country a proverb that—ah—possession is nine points of the law. The miniature to which you refer did not equitably belong to the—ah—Museum. By family right and ownership that sacred portrait belonged to *us*. We are the descendant, it is the portrait of our ancestress, it was stolen from our—ah—family many years ago." M. de

Grandemaison bowed his head and made the sign of the Cross. "My man, we assure you—we swear to you upon that sacred relic—ah—that it was always ours, by that equity of which you talk." He gazed benevolently at Mr. Shott.

Mr. Shott returned the gaze uneasily. Mr. Shott was fidgetting, Mr. Shott had begun to see new light on the matter.

"You mean it was yours first of all, sir, and was got away from you unjust?"

"Pre-cisely," said M. de Grandemaison. "As for the diamonds they are not diamonds now, they are—ah—paste, old French paste. The—ah—diamonds must have been removed from the setting at least—ah—a century ago. Considered as a jewel, Mr. Shott, the—ah—object is not worth ten pounds. The—ah—Sneakey you have mentioned was merely the—ah—instrument of its equitable restoration to us." M. de Grandemaison peacocked.

Mr. Shott put his finger-nails to his hair. The equity in the matter seemed to be turning in the scale.

"I—I s'pose you'll swear to all that, sir?" said Mr. Shott.

At that, M. de Grandemaison frowned; at that, M. de Grandemaison rose in his chair, clenched his hands on the table, and cast glances of anger at his visitor.

"How dare you, how dare you, you *manant*, you—ah—*canaille*!" M. de Grandemaison's sudden wrath was terrible, and yet comical to witness, for he had reddened apoplectically, his double chin seemed to have swelled to enormous size, and his protuberant eyes were glaring. "Coming to us—demanding hush-money from us! Common and ignorant, and—ah—democratic, and all that is base as you are! We—we—we will hang you, fellow, we will have you broken on the wheel, we——"

"Bless your heart, sir, I—I'm sorry!" faltered Mr. Shott.

But M. de Grandemaison had thrown over his chair and was advancing towards him.

"Bless your heart, sir!"—Mr. Shott retreated, Mr. Shott moved backward, put his left heel out into air, and fell down the steps.

M. de Grandemaison might have smiled, but he did not. Ragingly M. de Grandemaison kicked the bag and the umbrella down off the terrace on to Mr. Shott. Bewildered, uncomfortable, hurt but compunctious, Mr. Shott took up the bag and umbrella, and slowly took himself away for a while.

"Seems to me it's ekity what he said," he muttered as he came out of the archway. "As fur as I'm aware, that is. . . . An old oner, *he* is—old toff, and no mistake!"

Pied-de-nez, watching from the margin of the forest, saw Mr. Shott retire, and like a gargoye grinned.

XXIX

No sooner was the archway empty of Mr. Shott than M. de Grandemaison turned, took three slow steps, clung to the table a moment, and heavily lapsed into his chair. There for many moments he rested, respiring thickly, puffing out audible breath, and dabbing his steaming face. The strain of that unexpected interview had told upon M. de Grandemaison, and he reproached himself for feeling the strain. If an occasion of comparative slight emergency could thus tax his heart and nerves, how would it be when the hour for fateful effort and high assumption should come? . . . If ever it did come, that is : M. de Grandemaison reflected that it never might come ; he knew, and was ashamed of the knowledge, that he almost hoped the hour would never come. . . . After all, he had not managed this slighter affair so very badly, he told himself presently ; he had been imposing, awe-inspiring, brave, and convincing ; the vulgar, democratic person had weakened before him and was gone. . . .

"Père, dear?" It is Consolata's voice, tender and solicitous ; Consolata's own wisp of handkerchief touches M. de Grandemaison's cheeks, Consolata's hands, firm, cool, and fragrant, rest upon his forehead.

M. de Grandemaison closes his eyes ; that exquisite touch has soothed and calmed him ; but he still breathes heavily, and "It is far too warm for you here, père," says the solicitous voice. "You see, you have lived so long in England." Light lips bend down, to drop a feather of a kiss upon the bridge of M. de Grandemaison's more than Roman nose.

"New trouble, Consolata—a new trouble," M. de

Grandemaison murmurs. "Always trouble, always trouble for us !"

She draws his head against her shoulder and gently folds her arms about his neck.

"What trouble, père dear ? Is it—is it anything about the—the visitor, at the Maison ?"

"We are tired, Consolata, we ought not to have walked so much, don't you think ? In the—ah—vehemence of the afternoon. But we went to—ah—honour the young sir at the Maison. With our personal inquiries ?"

"Yes, père ?" There is inquiry in the tone.

"We—ah—favourably regard him, Consolata—he is descended from the—ah—Royal Stuarts."

"Is he, père ?" It is a voice of surprise.

"A good lad, we consider, Consolata. We permit you to—ah—manifest all civility to him. He is to—ah—attend here, to present himself to us, to-morrow—at twenty minutes past four."

"When will he go away, père ?" The girl's voice is low.

"When ? That, Consolata, is a question for an Intendant—you do not—ah—imagine that we concern ourself with—ah—details such as that ?"

"Because, père, when he is quite able to go, I . . . there is something I must say to you, père." She disregards the reproof.

"Is there, Consolata ?" M. de Grandemaison says that with indifference. M. de Grandemaison is seldom interested in things which he does not consider to concern himself. Pompously he coughs. "Consolata, we think we will go to our workshop. It will be—ah—refrigerating there."

"Do, père ! If you will take my arm ? I will carry in the grapes."

So M. de Grandemaison passes into his workshop, which is the corner room of the pavilion nearest the terrace and the arch. A very strange workshop it is. The walls are wainscot, the tall windows and the coved and painted ceiling look down on a parquet floor that is all spattered with black dust, like the floor of a forge. For this is not the workshop of a diamond-cutter ; M. de Grandemaison has ceased to be Mr. Knibbs, Dealer, he will never cut or polish a diamond with

the wheel again. This is a locksmith's workshop. M. de Grandemaison believes that he had an ancestor who was a zealous locksmith, and although the descendant does not particularly care for the hobby, it is almost a pious duty for him to be an amateur locksmith himself. So a lathe and a vice, an iron table and a range of tools, stand in the middle of the dusty parquet floor, and a collection of locksmithery lies treasured in the glass cases which gleam from the dark wainscot opposite the windows.

Let us examine M. de Grandemaison's collection of locksmithery. The slanting baize-covered shelves inside the glass cases are covered with ranged and numbered locks and keys. Heavy locks, light locks, rough and clumsy and brutal locks, delicate and fine locks, big locks and small locks, locks made of rude iron, locks made of damascened steel, locks of bronze, locks of brass, locks of copper, locks of silver, tiny locks of beaten gold; simple locks, subtle locks, plain locks, locks Dacalian and labyrinthine; locks of all shapes, dates, and sizes. Most of them M. de Grandemaison acquired in England years since; some of them he bought at the *Hôtel Druot* in Paris, the other week.

Here are locks with bosses and locks with spirals that were made four hundred years ago. Here are Sixteenth-century locks, with etched and graven keyholes; here are locks in a false Gothic style, that were forged under Louis XIV.; here are Normandy locks for wardrobes, with long twisted shields and heavy round bolts. And here, the gem of the collection, lies a small lock in ormolu, with the letter "L" cut on the escutcheon. M. de Grandemaison reverences that lock as the handiwork of a martyr; it was "pinched," as Mr. Shott would say, from a château, years ago.

And here is its key; here are keys by the hundred; simple keys, intricate keys, master-keys, skeleton keys, small keys, big keys, keys plain, keys lavishly ornamented, keys with two chimerae back to back for the handle, Roman keys of bronze, Cathedral keys of the Thirteenth-century, Gothic keys of the Fifteenth, keys of the Renaissance with handles shaped like salamanders, keys with the hedgehog device of Louis XII., Seventeenth-century keys shaped like dolphins, bastard Gothic keys under Louis XV., keys with trapezoid

handles contemporary with Henry II., and cross-shaped keys of the time when Henri Quatre came riding through the gatehouse of Château Royal to the arms of his mignonne.

Upon the surface of many of these locks and keys appear spidery lines of gold and silver, inserted to damascene and ornament the steel; but—sign of age—the gold has dulled to a coppery hue, and the silver has the look of pewter. Just as oxidized or dulled are now the riches which these locks and keys were hammered to guard.

For M. de Grandemaison has gathered here the full witness of man's cupidity, suspicion and dread, the centuries through. Here rest these abiding proofs of man's time-long defence against stealthy theft or violent rape of treasure; these antique guards but testify to the age-enduring folly, crime, and luxuriousness of mankind. A thousand eras have gone by since primordial man, moving amidst the rough Earth like a worm in dung, first rolled a boulder to the mouth of a cavern to shut up in safety his woman, his winter furs, and his store of food; but still we turn our keys and shoot our bolts of a night, against our enemies and our neighbours, and even our friends and kin.

And, safer still, in our minds we lock up our secrets, with close lips and dissembling eyes. M. de Grandemaison does that; he says no further word to his daughter of the new trouble which Mr. Shott has brought. Except when he peacocks he gives no hint of the greater secret which he has to guard. What *are* his hidden mental possessions, his hopes, his plans? What—even yet the question asks itself—what is the mystery of Château Royal?

M. de Grandemaison rests awhile in the old chair that fronts his collection; he is thinking of that locked-up secret, perhaps. Then he rises, girds himself with a leather apron, covers his sleeves with black linen guards, and takes up the unfinished key and the file. "You may depart now, Consolata—we will not detain you. We are better now, don't you think? We shall be tranquil here." With an anxious look, but obedient—always obedient—she goes; as the clock in the stable turret strikes six.

And now another man with a secret approached the

château ; this desperate owner of a secret had just quitted the forest ; the sound of the file was still audible through the corner window of the workshop when M. le Comte d'Ou came slowly up the terrace steps. M. le Comte had shot his way through the forest from Provenchel, and now he was coming for shelter to the château of his fathers and his boyhood's home.

M. le Comte had sore need of shelter for the time ; M. le Comte had begun to feel ill in the forest. "A devil's wood," Pied-de-nez called the chestnut copse where Dick Stewart awoke to lameness, and a devil's forest the forest might seem to be from which M. le Comte now emerged in a shrinking and desperate condition.

His dog with the spiky collar had trotted along quite quickly, but M. le Comte must follow him slowly, very slowly, as if too weary to carry his gun, his gamebag, and himself another furlong. He was ill, and he had the secret of his illness to keep from the inhabitants of the château ; yet to the château he must go, lest there might happen to him the worst. Slowly he climbed to the terrace, heavily he dropped the gun and the gamebag on the table, almost inaudibly he told his dog to watch them, and pantingly he dragged his steps towards the château door.

He looked about him in fear, but the sound of the file reassured him ; M. de Grandemaison in the workshop would not perceive him, and nowhere was the flutter of a white gown or the bulge of a purple dress to be seen. "They won't find it out, even this time, perhaps !" he told himself as he took shelter. Shelter and rest and hiding he must have.

For he had felt the aura. He had felt the aura while in the forest. And as he came through the château archway he had felt the aura again. A strange breath, that aura which he had felt ! Not the breath of early evening in the forest, not the draught of air through the arch ; no, it was the aura, *the* aura, the warning aura, and what it warned of he knew too well.

The door of the château was a solid old door that had seen as much of the world as a door in a Limousin château could see, and once or twice before it had seen what it was

to witness no. . The door stood back. Recessed, the door stood back, making almost a triangle of the space between it and the walls ; making a triangular cove there, and hiding a chair which stood in the cove. M. le Comte well knew that a chair stood there behind that door ; he had known it in his boyhood, he had hidden there before, at the warning of the aura : for whosoever feels that aura must seek for human neighbourhood, and yet from human eyes must hide. So now, when shakingly he came into the château hall, he slunk behind the door and hid himself in that recess.

If only *she* might not see him ! If M. de Grandemaison would keep in his workshop a while ! M. le Comte would rather die than be seen, he thought ; for he knew how ugly a picture he would make if seen—a picture unfitted to adorn that hall. The château hall was hung with portraits of the heads of the Maison d'On ; they were dead, but they looked alive. M. le Comte was alive, but he looked deathly. . . . He must not be seen, he must not be seen ! If only he could master himself, if he could keep quiet and hidden, if he could avoid that almost inevitable, harsh, involuntary scream ! . . .

M. le Comte had clenched his hands, he was holding them out upon his knees convulsively, his head was pushed forward stiffly, his chin protruded, his neck seemed stringy and rigid, his breath came in short irregular pants, his eyes were all but revulsed. Very ill and very ugly indeed looked M. le Comte, as he shook and suffered in his hiding behind the door.

For several minutes he shook and suffered there. Then, with infinite precaution against more than the necessary degree of effort, he drew from his pocket an *étui*, and from that small casket two pellets, which he swallowed. Then he resumed his rigid position, as motionless as possible again. But he panted ; he was glad that air came moving through the hall, in at the portal from the terrace and out at the back of the château. The air came to him coolingly, as he sat behind the door in his place of retreat and rest.

Though his body was now almost motionless he was thinking rapidly, for his brain seemed filled with hot blood.

"If only I can get it over without being seen—if it will pass off, as it sometimes does, without that awful cry, without the need for help!" He did not complete his thought precisely; no need for him to do that, he knew the usual ending of his strange illnesses too well. Sometimes when, as now, he had taken shelter quickly, had kept very quiet and still, and above all had not been seen, the ending, the ugly ending, had not come. Perhaps it would not come now. For there was no sign of Mademoiselle or of M. de Grandemaison. At present he seemed in safe hiding. He could be silent and still. And how comforting to be allowed to be still!

The ~~caveau~~ hall itself was very still; dim and cool and still. The shadow of the door enveloped him in grateful darkness; airs from the garden and the terrace brought coolness to him and a freshening feeling upon his wet white face. For now as he rested the skin of his face seemed to be stiffening and chipping, as though a film of ice were forming on it; he must not move a muscle, lest the ice should crack. . . . If only he could keep quite still, and unseen, and quiet long enough, perhaps, perhaps it would pass! . . .

XXX

FROM where he sat M. de Comte d'Ou could see the marble mouldings, wreathed with ormolu fillets, which framed the three tall portraits that adorned the right-hand wall of the château hall. There were six such portraits, he knew, and he could see the panelled frames of three of them. Ancestors of his, seigneurs and hunters, knights of the carpet and the tourney, ornaments of Court and camp were there portrayed; some of them superb in armour of gilt steel, some of them mysterious in sombre pourpoint, one of them sylvan in the green of *venerie*, one of them priestlike in archbishop's robes. Severin, Comte d'Ou knew them all, by their names and their exploits; they were the famous men of his ancestry. At seven years old his father had . . . him—little M. le Vicomte as he was then—by the hand, and had led him round the hall to study the portraits, learn the names, and doff his cap before each in turn with a formal little bow.

"César-Henri, King's son and Seigneur of Provenchel, Listrac and d'Ou, *salut!* Albert-Gervais-Severin, who died in battle at Ramillies, *salut!* Sigisbert-Silvère-Raphael, Archbishop of Angers, *salut!* Martial-François, companion of the King at Chambord and the familiar of Rohan, Charolais, and Madame de Longueville, *salut!*" From the other wall, though the Comte could not see it, shone out the pale face of Bertrand-Louis-François, killed at the Tuileries on the fatal tenth of August in defence of the Queen; the powder on his hair showed like a martyr's nimbus. From the other wall, too, frowned Lycurge-Marius, stiff in the uniform of a Marshal of the Empire, the cross of the Legion on his breast, as pinned

there by Napoleon himself. The dead illustrious of the Maison d'Ou, *salut!* . . .

Proud, proud of all this was the little pale, waxy-moustachioed man who sat shaking in the recess behind the door—proud of it all, and it all had been sold away from him! The château and the pleasure, the furniture and the portraits, the Maison de Julie and much of the demesne, had all been sold to M. de Grandemaison for four thousand louis. Four thousand louis only, a bagatelle! Sold by the present head of the House, the degenerate André Marquis d'Ou! The childless, wifeless, mad Marquis, a debauched old fellow of fifty, who would have sold the estate away altogether if he could! . . .

The man behind the door stirred angrily, forgetting his physical caution for the moment; and then, motionless again, he waited for the punishment of his movement; but the punishment did not come. Perhaps it would not come after all? Perhaps . . . perhaps . . . Yes sure, the danger must be passing off! The aura had warned him in time, the quiet and the hiding had saved him from the worst; he was spared this time; he was beginning to recover. Presently he could dare to rise, and to come out from behind the door. And in a little he could stand, unafraid of discovery, on the cool marble lozenges of the floor; in face of the grand stair that went winding up and dividing, he could stand there looking at the six portraits each in turn, and name them each again.

Pride is not always hard and imperious; pride can dwell in the subtle, the timid, the diseased and frail. Even this weakling of a Comte, tracked so and waited for by his malady, could be proud; we saw his pride betray itself to Dick Stewart at the Hotel Langouste. But his pride was hardly so personal as Dick Stewart then supposed; it was family pride, that vicarious sentiment which is the haughtiest pride of all. Sometimes it is a spur and an inspiration; and because his ancestors had been mighty in the chase, Severin, Comte d'Ou, though tracked and waited for by his malady, must set forth to track and wait for sport with gun and dog.

But there were always wounds for his pride, when he carried it in his breast to the château. The heads of his family in the past had owned the château and the lands and villages for many miles around; they had borne themselves as sumptuously and haughtily as they now lay in the chancel of the church at Listrac, magnificently inhumed beneath the proud shine of storied windows that diapered their monuments with supernatural light. Their château had been small but splendid, and a King had built it. Palissy and Robert had moulded and potted for it, Goujon had carved for it, Boule had inlaid for it; Claude, Lorraine, Greuze, Fragonard, Boucher, La Tour, Ingres and Isabey had painted for it; for it had Petitot enamelled and Perin limned. Alain Leu had besung it, Le Notre had gardened it, exquisite riches of the minor arts had jewelled it; till twenty years ago its caskets and cabinets had been glorious with treasures more valuable than their weight in the most precious of precious stones. Fans that Watteau had touched with the grace of an epoch fine and polite and vanished; Renaissance ivories, of satyrs at their amours under Gothic arcades; bonbonnières of Sèvres and Meissen, luminous and wonderful; pale biscuit porcelain shining with reflections bluish and cold; figures of fragile nymphs and tender shepherds, hardly chipped or faded; patch-boxes of lapis-lazuli, opal matrix, and marvellous filigree of gold; a Book of Hours, that had belonged to a Madame d'Ou, who became a convert to the Roman Methodism of Port Royal; armour and weapons inlaid with silver, ivory, and mother of pearl; cameos and intaglios cut by Nasaro and Rossi; musical instruments made by "Pleyel, facteur du Roy"; tapestries, glorious beyond compare and repair; and jewels that Boehmer had sold. Spacious *salles*, high doorways, moulded, gilded and painted ceilings, carved panels, monumental chimney-pieces, and vast stairs of marble escorted by railings of wrought iron touched with copper, surrounded and guarded these treasures in the past; but now, though the guardians remained, the treasures were gone. Sold at the Hotel Drouot they had been; sold away from the château by the degenerate André, Marquis d'Ou.

Yet the six great portraits remained ; between and above them the horns of stags outbranched, and the tusks of wild boars seemed to gnash ; under each such trophy of the chase was engraved on silver the date of the hunt, and the name of the glade where the beast was brought to bay. A frieze of wolves' teeth, even, jagged out around that other portrait, of Ethelbald-Marie-Lovejoie, seigneur and Nimrod, who could wind the great horn of brass which curled like a dissected snail-shell above his portrait over the spot where Severin, Comte d'Ou had been hiding behind the door. Severin, Comte d'Ou, could remember how even in his father's day the family mania for the chase persisted ; he could recall the uproar of hunt gatherings in that hall, the gay crowd all scarlet and green on the terrace, the lavish stirrup-cups repeated again and again, the leaping and seething hounds, the fanfare of golden horns, the chattering departure, the wild cavalcade of Marquis and Comte, Madame and Mademoiselle, with half the county squires of the Upper Limousin at their spurs. And then at night, when the hunt that was up was down, and bidden or unbidden guests were crowding every room in the château, what feasting, what drinking, what roystering mirth,—what wild carousal, the women all shut away ! Jest and laughter, tale and song, gambling, and shouting inebriety prolonged till morning, and dying out in spasms as guest after guest fell prone, and the noble host, without lack of courtesy, might roll to the floor himself. A hard-fighting, hard-hunting, deep-drinking set they had been, the men of the Maison d'Ou ; famous for that, even in the hard-hunting and deeply-drinking Upper Limousin ; and André, the present Marquis, showed his race and blood.

M. le Comte looked up at the portrait of Lycurge-Marius, Marquis d'Ou, severely splendid as a Marshal of the Empire, and effulgent with the cross of the Legion of Honour that was pinned to the breast of his tunic by the Emperor himself. Ah, that one, he, Lycurge-Marius, had been the last great head of the Maison d'Ou ; he died at Leipsic, on the second day of battle. Before Napoleon arose he, Citizen Lycurge-Marius, had known how to keep

the château and domain untouched by the Revolution; General and Marshal Lycurge-Marius had known how to amass new wealth with which to regild the old name. From the date of his death till the present there had hardly been a decent and conservative Marquis d'Ou; for more than half a century the doings at the château had been the scandal of the country-side. Wine and wagers and woman had stript the château of wealth and honour; the kennels, the valety, the outlying lands, a forest here, a farm yonder, had been cast like fuel into a devouring flame. And amidst this rapid decay and wild destruction M. le Comte had been born. His malady came to him from dissolute and brandy-sodden ancestors, as did the squandering mania to his elder brother the Marquis as well. Yes, the glories of the Maison d'Ou were past, and perhaps they could never be renewed. A few parcels of land were left, and that was all; even the six great portraits did not belong to the present or future Marquis now.

Severin, Comte d'Ou, stood gazing into the emptiness of the great chimney-place, that yawned for the wood-flames of winter, and wondered, wondered; for the twentieth time he wondered if M. de Grandemaison could be really so wealthy as was supposed? What dowry would Mademoiselle receive? M. de Grandemaison gave little proof of wealth; he did not fill the stables and the kennels, or crowd the servants' hall; small as the château was for a great House, M. de Grandemaison did not fit it out with proper service or fill it with guests. No, M. de Grandemaison could hardly be wealthy; the château itself would be the chief part of his daughter's dower. Yet if M. le Comte should be M. le Marquis when his brother died, and that could hardly be long now—could marry Mademoiselle de Grandemaison, the château and the pleasure, added to the remnants of the domain, and the ten thousand francs a year bequeathed him by his mother's brother, would make up a semblance of a decent estate for a Marquis d'Ou.

And Mademoiselle was so charming and noble; no Marquis need feel shame of a Marquise so proud and sweet. If what her father claimed were real, indeed, she would add

great lustre to the Maison d'Ou. And M. de Grandemaison had promised him her hand, so soon as he should become Marquis, if in the mean time he would further the projects which M. de Grandemaison cherished for himself. If only M. le Comte could conceal from them his malady, until the betrothal had taken place!

Thus thought the hot pride and tepid love of Severin, Comte d'Ou, one of the few dozen authentic Comtes left in France. And now that he had recovered from the threatened attack, and might venture to be seen, he crossed the hall and passed through doorway after doorway unannounced, towards the workshop; the sound of the file grew clearer as he went on and on, past door after door. M. de Grandemaison would greet him cordially, he knew. There would be dinner, and the sweet presence of Made-moiselle; and then in the cool of the night the walk back to Provenchel and bed at the Langouste.

XXXI

At eight o'clock that evening, while the Comte was dining with the Grandemaçons, Dick Stewart was sitting within the portico at the Maison, all alone ; for the Abbé had gone to the château.

"I dislike to leave you, Stewart," the Abbé had said, standing stately beside him in silken cassock and bands. "But M. de Grandemaçon is punctilious—I am his chaplain—and I seldom cross him. He insists on my dining with him always. But I shall be back here in little more than an hour. Meanwhile——"

"Meanwhile," Dick Stewart said cheerfully, "I'll souse my ankle a bit more, and smoke a pipe with my old chum John Evelyn—I have him in my pocket. Heavens above, dear brick of an Abbé, don't worry your kind heart about me! I'll be all right."

And then, left alone, he had pulled out a pocket edition of his favourite book the *Kalendarium*, again to read of John Evelyn's experiences in France.

Now as he turned the leaves his eye fell on passages which reminded him of his own recent travelling in the realm. "I arriv'd," he read, "rejoic'd that after so many disasters and accidents in a tedious peregrination I was gotten so neere home. And here I resolved to rest myself before I went further."

"Exactly!" Dick Stewart thought. "Sensible old chap! Just what I mean to do myself. I've fallen on my feet here—Archange is quite the toppingest kind of a priest I ever met—I'm going to rest and let him doctor me. And then, to-morrow—to-morrow. . . . Consolata . . . lovely-sweet! . . ."

"To-morrow! . . . That's what I was saying last night.

With me it's always to-morrow. . . . But to-morrow, the real to-morrow, the day after to-day, I shall see her, hurray! . . . Souise, you blessed idiot of an ankle that blundered me into this little paradise of a place! Souise, get saturated, become cold and firm and strong for to-morrow! To-morrow you must carry me to see Consolata. And her father, that queer old peacock of a bird!"

Then in the silence, in the pellucid calmness, in the white peace of evening, he turned the leaves and read again. "This is an Archbishopric, and the Province gives title to the Heir Apparent of France. Here we supped and lay, having among other dainties a dish of truffles, an earth nut, found out by a hogg trained to it, and for which these animals are sold at a great price." The reader's head went back and tobacco-smoke poured upward, as for a minute or two he thought of Cochon, the lame little "hogg." "Knowing little beast! . . . Wonder how his trotter is, by now? . . . Wonder what 'greate price' they would sell him for? . . . Rather like to buy him and take him to London. He'd root in Lincoln's Inn Fields and astonish the beadle! . . ."

He turned more leaves. "Extraordinary book!" he reflected. "It absolutely mirrors that calm old codger Evelyn! And to think there are people who prefer Pepys! Fudge!" Suddenly he lifted his head. "By Jove, though—*what's that?*"

He had glimpsed a face, at the gate of the little idle garden: for a moment a face had shown itself at the level of the upper bar. It had seemed a small face, a round face, a boyish face beneath torn straw, and "'Pon my soul!" Dick Stewart thought, "I verily believe that was Coco! . . . If it wasn't Coco, may I eat his hat!"

He stared at the gate again, but the face was gone. He watched the gate for several minutes, but the face did not reappear. Hardly worth while, he thought, to get up and go and look for the intruder. Coco it must have been, though; Coco had intruded, Coco had peeped and peered, and Coco had vanished. "But what on earth can that astounding young nipper be wanting here?"

He did not marvel that Coco should have managed to pass the arch, the broom, and the charmillé, for Coco was a penetrating, don't-care young person, and, like Habakkuk, "capable de tout." No, but what would be the youngster's motive? What was his object in coming there?

Dick Stewart stirred, uneasily. Coco had talked of the cleverness of his father the *agent*, and had mentioned "the great Joseph Leroux." Dick Stewart had heard of Joseph Leroux before; the fame of Joseph Leroux had reached as far as to legal circles in England; Joseph Leroux had even been heard of in Scotland Yard; as a cunning and successful agent of the Prefecture de Police at Paris Joseph Leroux was actually known at the Old Bailey, wonderful to relate! In point of fact, Joseph Leroux was a detective. And if Coco's father was himself the great Joseph Leroux——?

Again came that unpleasant sensation, which he had experienced two or three times lately, of becoming involved in a mystery that perhaps was criminal. Could there be something "shady" as well as mysterious about M. de Grandemaison, the Abbé, and Château Royal? . . . About M. de Grandemaison there might be, though the old gentleman seemed simple enough. But about Archange? His mind contradicted it for Archange—and his very soul denied it for Consolata.

If Joseph Leroux actually should be on the look-out near, if he really did watch and spy upon Château Royal, what then? That was no proof of guilt on the part of the Grandemaçons. French law is no more infallibly wise and just than English law. "'Tisn't ekity, as Shott would say!"

Then came a leaping feeling in his breast. There might be an opportunity, a chivalrous chance, a dear duty for him—to aid and protect Consolata. If the police were on the look-out for her father—if danger impended over Château Royal?

"Rot!" he said to himself the next moment. "No such luck!" Coco had said that his father was giving him a holiday. Coco and his father were gypsying it with a van. . . . "Besides, the Grandemaçons are rich and titled

—Archange is a Bishop or an Archbishop after all, I dare say—and she is to marry a Comte. *That's* the only danger for her—no worse than that is possible, but that seems no danger in snobbish and unromantic France. And how am I to save her from that ? ”

He lit his pipe again, to smoke it gloomily, as he turned over the leaves of the *Kalendarium* in search of an apposite page.

Twilight in violet came down upon the world as he turned to the pages which describe the “equipage and glorious cavalcade of the young French monarch Lewis XIV. passing to Parliament ;” a curious passage to read of in modern and Republican France, for it is a picture of what French Royalty at its height could seem. “First came the Capitaine of the King’s Aides, at the head of fifty, richly liveried ; next, the Queene Mother’s Light Horse, an hundred, the Lieutenant being all over covered with embroidery and ribbons ; then the King’s Light Horse, two hundred, richly habited, with four Trumpets in blew velvet ”—*blew* is good, for trumpets, the reader thought—“embroidered with gold, before whom rode the Count d’Olonne, whose belt was set with pearles. Next went the Grand Provost’s Company on foote, with the Grand Provost on horseback ; after them the Swisse, in black velvet, led by two gallant Cavalieres habited in scarlet-coloured sattin after their country fashion, very fantastick. Then came the Aide de Ceremonies ; next the Grandees of the Court, the Governors of strong places, and the Lieutenants-General of Provinces, magnificently habited and mounted. These were headed by two trumpets, and the whole troupe covered with gold, jewels, and rich caparisons, were followed by six Trumpets in blew velvet, preceding as many Heralds in blew velvet semeé with fleurs de lys caduces in their hands. Behind them came one of the Masters of Ceremonies ; ”—As he read, Dick Stewart seemed to see and hear old Evelyn standing at a window, watching the procession, inquiring who this or that might be, and noting it down on his tablets.—“Then divers Marshals, and many of the nobility, exceeding splendid. Then came abundance of footmen and

pages of the King, new liveried, with white and red feathers ; next the Garde de Corps and other officers ; and lastly appeared the King himself, on an Isabella barb, upon which a housing, semeé with crosses of the Order of the Holy Ghost and Fleurs de lys ; the King himself like a Young Apollo, in a suit so cover'd with rich embroidery that one could see nothing of the stuff under it. He went almost the whole way with his hat in hand, saluting the ladys and acclamators, who filled the windows with their beauty and the air with 'Vive le Roy !' After the King followed divers greate persons of the Court, exceeding splendid ; also his Esquires, Master of Horse, Grand Escuyer, and Guards of Scotch ; twixt their files were divers Princes of the Blood, Dukes, and Lords. After all these the Queen's Guard of Swisse, pages, and footemen ; then the Queene mother herself, in a rich coach, with Monsieur the King's brother, the Duke of Orleans, and some other Lords and Ladys of Honour. About the coach marched her Exempts des Gardes, then the company of the King's Gens d'Armes well mounted, a hundred and fifty, with four Trumpets, and as many of the Queene's. Lastly an innumerable company of coaches full of ladys and gallants. In this equipage passed the Monarch to his Parliament."

Dick Stewart shut the book upon his fingers, and leaned back in thought awhile ; then he set the book down on the table, and took from his pocket the photograph which he had brought from Saumur. The connection of ideas was plain. This purported to be the portrait of the last Duc de Normandie, son of Louis XVI. For in the procession of the Bourbons, after Louis XIV., "like a young Apollo," had come Louis XV. like an old Silenus, and after Louis XV. the deluge, as he had said—a deluge of blood, by which Louis XVI. was swept away. "Under Louis XIV. the Monarchy lost its senses," Stewart thought, thinking again of the vast and vain parade which Evelyn described, "and under Louis XVI. the Monarchy lost its head." The Dauphin of the latter evil days, Charles-Louis, last Duc de Normandie, never came to the throne ; the throne had been

demolished, there was none to come to ; Charles-Louis, last Duc de Normandie, escaped the scaffold but died of disease in the Temple prison. And so, but for brief subsequent flashes soon extinguished, ended the glories of the throne of France and Navarre. Finished the splendours of Versailles, Rambouillet, and Marly ; ended and gone the Pompadour and the Dubarry, the paniered gowns of velvet all *semée* with lilies and stars ; gone the gay fifes and feathers, the sonorous trumpets and loud drums of royal war, the horns of the blaring royal chase ; all done away with, Monsieur Frère du Roy and Mesdames les Enfants de France ; vanished Monseigneur Cardinal Prince de Rohan, and Léonard the great Court barber ; at rest the silver chariots, closed the gold-shuttered windows ; a wilderness the Parc aux Cerfs ; no more, the reign and splendour of the rapier, the stately sieges and slow battles of Maurice de Saxe, the heavy fortifications à la Vauban ; faded the Royal lilies, those flowers of snow so drenched in red.

And yet—Dick Stewart took up the photograph again—here was what purported to be the sun's copy of a portrait of Charles-Louis, last Dauphin and Duc de Normandie, by right divine Louis XVII. of France and Navarre, who died in the Temple prison at ten years old, and yet was alive and fat and forty in the year 1825 ! A Pretender, a Perkin Warbeck of course, no matter how much the Curator at Saumur might vow the contrary. And yet . . . *Did* the boy escape from jail, *did* he live into full manhood ?

Dick Stewart's mind moved sympathetically. There had been Stuart Pretenders, too, after Charles Edward, the Young Pretender died ; though Charles Edward himself was no Pretender, indeed. The Young Pretender, like the Old Pretender, had been King by right divine. And with the House of Stuart, as with the House of Bourbon, great houses of the loyal nobility had gone down. There are still Legitimists in the Thames Valley somewhere, who every January wreath the effigy of Charles I. in Whitehall ; just so there are still Legitimists in France, who scheme for a Bourbon restoration. "But never a *second* Restoration !" Dick Stewart thought. "Charles II. came back to England, and Louis XVIII. came back to France, but—no

second Restoration, scheme the legitimate descendants of Royal duffers as they may."

No doubt the Grandemaçons belonged to a loyal house that had gone down with the Bourbons twice; the Grandemaçons of to-day were Loyalist and Legitimist, he thought; that would account for the pomposity of the old gentleman and the old-world grace of Consolata. Having made his pile (as Mr. Pratt of Theobalds Road would say) M. de Grandemaçon had shaken off the business shell at Hatton Garden, and had come to dwell in state in his native France. Loyalty to the past would seem to the Grandemaçons to enhance their own nobility, and just as in England still Charles I. seems a Royal Martyr to many, so still is Louis XVI. a Royal Martyr in the thoughts of many people in France.

But if the guillotined father were a Royal Martyr, what less was the imprisoned and harried and filth-tortured little son? A martyr twice, indeed, if he survived! *Did* he escape, *did* he live into manhood, and know derision as well as rejection for his claims? And *was* that his portrait, the picture that mysteriously vanished from Saumur?

Dick Stewart set down the photograph, and lay back musing; steadily the spirals of smoke ascended in the still air. The little idle garden sent out a cooling fragrance, the evening-primrose shone against the darkening hedge; nine times the bell in the stables sounded. Then there was silence again, silence, nothing but dreaming silence, except now and then for the indistinct rustling of trees and the other soft sighs of Nature. Twilight, blue-grey twilight, ascended; night came gliding in from the charmille, and the silence deepened, hypnotic. Motionless Stewart lay, silent in the stillness, inert in the calm. He felt alone and distant, removed from realities and poised as in a dream. Now not a breath, not a sound, not a rustle near him; silence, silence infinitely unmaterial and unreal. Then—

"Candida, fulgida,
Sorge la luna."

pellucid and raying, up swam the moon above the dark lace

of the tree-tops, the opalescent light of it diffusing, silver-cold ; and once again by forest and plain and the infinite spread of the world it was night, night starry and moony, night august and divine. . . .

A distant step on the gravel of the charmille ; in the dreaming silence Stewart heard it keenly. He stirred ; this would be the Abbé. He listened to the nearing footfalls. Then he hid the photograph in his pocket, and turned his eyes towards the gate.

XXXII

"I HAVE brought you something by way of dinner, Stewart—supper rather," the Abbé said. Coco heard him.

"That's ever so good of you, really!" Faldalaldo answered. Coco heard him.

"Cold, I'm afraid," the Abbé went on, "but we will do better for you to-morrow." Coco heard that quite plainly.

To-morrow, eh? Coco has been hiding and watching and listening for that, and now that he knows that Faldalaldo, the niggardly of matches and inclined to lecture, is to remain at the Maison on the morrow, the hiding and watching and listening Coco prepares to carry that piece of information to his father in the forest, to the great Joseph Leroux.

Soft-footed, and with all the precautions of an Apache brave, goes Coco through the charmille, till he comes to the edge of the tree-shadow, where he pauses to think and plan, as an Apache brave should do. On his left hand the cover is continued, by the shadow of a hedge that falls on the drive, and Coco thinks it best to go stoopingly up that strip of cover. But he comes to the end of it, and must pause to plan again. He lies down on his stomach and writhes himself across the drive at the shortest angle to it, till he has come within the cover of the terrace-wall. Very proud of this particular piece of work is Coco when he has done it; unseen, though the moonlight pouring down made him look like a caterpillar crossing an iris spear, he has done it; it is the feat of a redskin, he tells himself—"d'un Peau-Rouge." Stooping along under the terrace-wall, he escapes the light which falls from the lower windows of the château and any eyes that may be looking out; swiftly he plunges into the darkness of the archway, and boldly he

emerges upon the publicity of the common road. "Hi-tiddly-hi-ti!" says Coco rejoicing. "I done it! Father couldn't ha' done it more clever than that himself!"

But now, when approaching the verge of the forest, even the self-confidence of a boy of twelve may well begin to quit him, for the forest will be dark within and underneath. Moonlight may silver the tree-tops, those fantastic, never-still, never-silent tree-tops, but the forest is looking like the black heads of giants against the sky; and moving against the sky; but the forest will be dark underneath. Moonlight may turn the drives and paths of the forest into glacier-courses, unrolled in lines, all stainless and iridescent with moon-snow; but trees, big trees, old trees, dark and mysterious trees laying their heads together conspiringly, uncanny trees with man-grasping arms, that rustle at you all of a sudden when you are least expecting it and when there is positively no wind at all, stand up along the edges of the drives and footpaths which you must take; trees that are ghastly white at their edges, but funeral black everywhere else. So black-and-white that they remind Coco of the palls of black velvet and silver that he has seen on the way to the cemetery at Père-la-Chaise; trees, awful trees, that seem processions of death. Besides, what travellers from beyond the bourne may there not be in the forest, returned to haunt you at night, to claw at you with writhing hands, and madly mop and mow?

"No good father saying there isn't!" Coco tells himself, referring to phantoms, stryges, incubi, and things. "Garn! I knows better! This old woodyard's chock full of 'em—might be coffin-planks! I've heard 'em, hundreds of 'em, two or three nights, hi-tiddly-hi-tying round the van, while father's snoring!"

Had Coco been an ordinary boy it would be a trembling and shrinking Coco that into this magical forest of night and fear must now go.

But Coco is no ordinary boy. "Garn!" he says to himself, "I'm a Peau-Rouge, I'll scalp 'em!" The one consideration that makes Coco at all uncomfortable is that he ought to have been back at the van long before this.

"You're to get here before daylight's gone," his father had commanded. "Only it was such fun watching Faldalaldo, and him never supposing *I* was there, the silly zebra, not he!" says Coco, mentally. "And I warn't sure, neither, not till the Abbé comes back and says to-morrow! Looked as if he was to, though, Faldalaldo did. Reading books, he was!" says Coco with fine contempt. "Garn! What's he reading for, here? Might as well be at school if you've got to read! If I'd let off my catapult I could ha' hit the silly zebra on the silly head as easy as easy. Right on his nose, I could—or in his stummick. My aunt, yes, I should just think I could!"

Coco the insouciant takes a dozen strides and finds himself plunged in the awe and splendour of the moon-drenched forest, now so white-and-black as to suggest dark river ice lying between banks of dazzling snow. The moonlight seems cold, and perhaps that is why the boy begins to shiver. "S'pose I sing a bit?" he thinks:

'En montant sur la Tour Eiffel
Avec ma cousine Gabriellé.'

But he tries that remedy for nervousness in vain, and he soon desists, for the sound of his quaverings comes back at him, as though mimicked by the mysterious beings who lurk at night under trees. Then an eagle-owl shouts its mad cry, the cry of a lunatic at large, and out of the damp shadows come the creaking notes of toads. "My aunt!" thinks Coco, "it's awful! S'pose I smoke a bit? Got plenty o' matches now." He had "pinched" them, as Mr. Shott would say, from the van.

Puffing more frequently and audibly than an accomplished tobacco-smoker would consider good style, Coco hurries on. The deeper among the trees he goes the weaker becomes his contempt for phantoms, horny goblin visions, and things; every now and then the stem of the corncob pipe clicks under his shaking little teeth. But he well knows his way to the van where his father awaits him, and it is not so very far; he must follow this particular drive for half a mile till he comes to a big hornbeam tree that is blazed—how Redskin!—with a cross; and from

that point a footpath will take him to his father. A longish way, after all, but Coco wends it almost courageously; he comes to the blazed hornbeam and peers down the narrow path.

Meanwhile the father of Coco sits meditating and smoking, on the steps of the van in the hidden little glade. He has finished writing the day's report; all but the last paragraph, which he will add when Coco brings him news; already he has signed "Joseph Leroux" at the bottom of the last page of the report, with a noble flourish under that noble name. Presently he will shut the report within a sealed covering—a covering less pervious to the eyes of a village postmistress than is the kind of envelope usually procurable in France; already upon the double-extra-thick-wove English-made envelope he has scrawled the letters B. S. S. M. I. P., which clerks in the travelling postal vans, but not village postmistresses, know to be capitals for "Bureau of Special Service, Ministry of the Interior, Paris." Behind the famous Agent shows the doorway of the van, and the lamp still burning on the little swing table; the doorway is an oblong of brown and yellow. But the light of the lamp is too faint to reveal the features of Joseph Leroux to us as we watch him; he sits in the shadow, on the middle step of the van, smoking and meditating, and waiting for Coco to appear.

The great Joseph Leroux has begun to feel anxious about his son, for although the full moon is up as high as any full moon can be, the forest is misleading by night. This is not the first time that Joseph Leroux has felt anxious about Coco; apart from his work, Coco has become his chief anxiety. As the most trusted Agent of the Special Service department, sent by the French Home Office hither, thither, and any whither, Joseph Leroux for three years past has enjoyed the benefit of being a widower; he may suddenly absent himself from home, and remain away for weeks, without fear or reproach, never needing to report his whereabouts or his doings to Madame; on the other hand, he suffers, professionally and paternally, from the drawback of being the father of a

gamin of a son. He does not greatly regret that Madame Leroux should have left him, absenting herself permanently in worlds unknown; but he certainly regrets that Madame Leroux should have left a Coco behind. To a widower a boy like Coco is more a nuisance than a treasure, often. Unmothered, and consigned to hired care, young Coco has added to the other defects of boyhood a slangy pertness of speech, a bumptious and self-opiniated habit, and an accomplished acquaintance with tobacco. Coco has never been whacked; as a Frenchman, the great Joseph Leroux could more comfortably see the guillotine at La Roquette do its red work on some rascal who was never whacked when a boy, than himself admonish, or allow another to administer, corporal reproof to Coco with a suitable cane or tawse. And Joseph Leroux is glad that he has not to report to Coco's mother how her orphan behaves and goes on.

There are schools in Paris, and Coco is a weekly boarder at one of them; but there are also long vacations from schools in Paris, and where shall Coco pass the holiday time? It is to the credit of Coco that he intensely admires and loudly vaunts at school the great Joseph Leroux; and "If I take him in hand myself a bit?" the father thought, six weeks or so ago, when the beginning of a sudden mission to a secluded part of the Limousin coincided with the opening of vacation at Coco's school. So into the Limousin they have come together, the father and son, and the father has tried his hand at moral suasion and didactic education, to counteract if possible the effects on Coco of a motherless home and a French Lycée. He has prevented Coco from the open use of tobacco, he has chidden his slangy pertness, he has tried to develop in him some degree of taciturnity and reserve. To that end he has given him secrets to keep,—to be accurate, the halves of secrets—encouraging him to conceal affairs which the boy does not fully understand. And with what the ushers at the Lycée would consider a most whimsical idea of moral education, the great Joseph Leroux has set his son brief tasks of watching and reporting as to certain doings at Château d'Ou.

For Château d'Ou lies under surveillance; the Bureau

of Special Service at Paris keeps the sharpest of its many eyes open on Château d'Ou. Mysterious people are domiciled at Château d'Ou, and daily the Bureau must be kept informed of what its sharpest eye perceives at the château. The Bureau's sharpest eye is Joseph Leroux, and the better to watch unnoticed he has procured for himself and Coco the use of a basket-seller's house-van, which is hidden in the forest of Listrac, not a mile from Château d'Ou.

The forest of Listrac is a long and curving stretch of woodland, almost crescent in shape, that spreads over plateau and hillock in an arc, with one horn approaching Provenchel. The other horn bends round to the quarry where we first met Coco; past the inn of fantastic interviews where we first met Pied-de-nez and Mr. Shott. To-night the forest is marvellously beautiful, with ebony shadow and argent light through all its vast domain. Amidst a flock of fleeces which look like argosies but are clouds, a radiance almost supernatural spreads from horizon to horizon. By-and-by the thousand little fleeces will conjoin, and darkness will spread from horizon to horizon, and rain will descend, as so often it does at night in the Limousin. But at present the wide curve of woodland lies like a huge fleece of ermine itself, white in the moonbeams and black in the splotches of shadow, a great weird place of lights and darks, with dew forming in the depths and, mirrored in each tiny orb of dew, a tinier moon.

Joseph Leroux makes his pipe go tut-tut, by way of expressing vexation, for Coco has not even yet returned.

"Wish I hadn't sent the little chap—never thought he'd stay so late as this—better go and look for him at once—maybe he's lost!"

Abruptly rising, Joseph Leroux comes out of the shadow of the van into the brightness of the glade. We see him plainly now; he is Pied-de-nez.

We thought when we saw him first, you remember, that he might not really be the Pied-de-nez he seemed. Why Joseph Leroux on duty should wear a disguise is obvious—indeed your great detective comes quickly into a permanent

frame of mind which makes him uncomfortable when *not* disguised—and the get-up which Joseph Leroux had adopted was the best possible disguise for his purpose in the Limousin. In rural France a chemineau who seems a little crazy is leniently regarded as a pet of the Bon Dieu. Instinctively the peasants seem to know that neither their life nor the life of town-dwellers is the truly happy life, and that the happiest of all beings are those whom God's finger has touched with simpleness, and with a little of what the world calls madness. Without knowing it, Bonne committed quite a breach of Limousin good taste when she attacked a Pied-de-nez with a broom. In the Limousin a crazy chemineau may wander whither he will, unquestioned; as a chemineau Joseph Leroux could have passed the arch at Château Royal, gone to the servants' door, and watched, listened, and studied unsuspected while he fruitfully begged, had it not been for the English ignorance and intolerance of tramps shown by Bonne. A useful disguise, and a complete one; for although the ragged black blouse is borrowed, like the van, and the cross on his nose is only blue paint, as Joseph Leroux now goes up the path towards the blazed hornbeam his semblance is perfect; a true vagabond, a born chemineau, one might swear.

As up the path he goes in haste he is thinking of Coco, but ourselves let us consider why he should have dealt with Dick Stewart in the way he had done so far; why he struck that skilful blow with his ironshod staff, at just the right millimetre of the surface of the ankle; why he should have guided the inquirer to Château Royal, and why he wished him to enter it worn-out and helpless and lame?

"If you let things happen—if you don't get hold of things and manage them," Dick Stewart said to Pied-de-nez in the chestnut copse, you remember, "why, naturally, things get hold of you and manage you! What do you say to that?" Pied-de-nez said nothing to it, you remember; but he got hold of Stewart and managed him deftly, conveying him to Château Royal in just the condition which best suited his plan.

What *was* his plan? No such scheme had occupied the

detective's mind 'til Dick Stewart, innocently wandering and questioning. all along. Innocently Dick Stewart had questioned Coco about Château Royal; Coco knew that Château d'Ou known to some people as Château Royal—that was one of the halves of a secret which Leroux had confided to the boy. Informed by Coco, Leroux himself had tracked this English questioner, and at the inn had heard the inquiry repeated. Following distantly, he had found the Englishman and Cochon slumbering side by side under the chestnut boughs, the "Phare de la Loire" and the photograph from Saumur lying between. And then had come the plan, and the blow on the ankle. Why?

If Joseph Leroux could lame this Englishman, lame him just enough and not too much; if he could bring him lame to the château, and send him there in a fainting and outworn condition, the odds were that the Englishman would have to be housed at the château awhile. It was not to be expected that such an Englishman as Stewart appeared to be would blab to a Pied-de-nez, or communicate to a Joseph Leroux undisguised, the things he might hear or note in the château, but he could be compelled to give evidence of the kind in a law court latter on. At any rate, the coming of the Englishman, interested in the people at the château as his questions showed him to be, might quicken the course of events there, which Joseph Leroux considered had until then been intolerably slow. Leroux was anxious for some tangible result that he could report to Paris, for some action that he might bring to an issue. The Englishman's presence in the château was likely to precipitate that; because he came from England whence the Grandemaïsons had come, and he carried in his pockets the newspaper and the photograph from Saumur.

As Joseph Leroux nears the blazed hornbeam the perfume of tobacco comes to him, wafted across a dell of darkness into which the path there descends.

"That you, Coco?" he cries.

"Hi-tiddly-hi, father—that you?" Coco is knocking the ash out of his pipe as he speaks. "My aunt, father, it's all right! I see him plain enough! He's going to stop

there to-morrow ! . . . *And* I see that funny zebra with the bag ! ”

“ Good ! ” said Joseph Leroux. “ Cleverly done, my son. Now I will put it in my report. ” He returns to the van. “ I have succeeded in the plan I reported to your Excellency by letter yesterday: Monsieur Stewart is likely to remain at the château for some days. Another Englishman has arrived, with a tale about justice and equity. I expect that this may bring things to a head. ” Having written that in the blank space above his signature, he closes the envelope, seals and stamps it, and descends the steps. “ Now, my lad, we will go to the post, ” he says. “ We can go together to-night, nobody will be about to see us ; I expect the woman at the post-office is abed. ”

Through the wood and out of it they go together, the rustical chemineau and the Paris gamin, a fantastic pair in the fantastic moonlight, going silently along together in the lonesomeness and awe of the large and silent night ; tramping on, through the ermine whiteness splotched with shade, over the glimmer of the moon-snow they go to the post ; under a sky so bright with the larger light that it pales the swarm of stars.

XXXIII

"DREAMLIKE!" the Abbé had been saying meanwhile, as with large and musing eyes he gazed out upon the white garden.

But Dick Stewart was munching still.

"We dream, and we wake," the Abbé said. "On rêve, et puis on se reveille."

"Exactly," said Dick Stewart, pushing his plate away. "There! I feel better now, Archange. What was it you were saying, by-the-by? I didn't heed. I was ravenous, and when I'm ravenous I'm prosaic. I'll listen better now; you were saying——?"

"Nothing important. Stewart, I have been thinking about you. I have been studying you, professionally; I am both priest and doctor, you must remember."

"So you are!" Dick Stewart said uneasily. "Awful combination! Well, what do you see in me? Say it out, don't hesitate—fire away, as I am doing." He drew the first breath of a pipe.

"You are versatile and erratic, are you not? You have what we call a 'grain de folie' in you. Yet you are very persistent, I imagine?"

"Correct," Dick Stewart said, "first shot." He laid the used match on the table. "Monseigneur, I score you one. Proceed."

"I think you may have been rather selfish, perhaps? Too self-contained, though you are affability itself when you please. Too much self-centred. Except with Loxton-Phipps, perhaps?"

A second match was ranked with the other on the table. "Since my mother died I have. Proceed."

"You can make yourself pleasant to anybody of any

social class. But it is usually condescension when you do, for you are very proud."

With decision a third match was placed on the table.

"And Stewart—are you not a little indolent? You do not work at your profession, do you? Or at anything else?"

Emphatically another match was laid down.

"You are impetuous—you might do the maddest, most impulsive things, in an emergency?"

"Right," said Dick Stewart; "I have done them," and down went another match.

"You can hate well, can't you? But . . . you have never loved well?"

The patient scored half a match this time. "Right and wrong," he said. "I *can* love well; I have seen your cousin. . . . But—one, two, three, four—five and a half hits out of six shots—Archange, you must have been good in the theatre at Bart.'s—I believe you could dissect a fellow alive."

"You have been rather shut up in your culture, haven't you? Since you left Oxford, I mean. Shut up with yourself in the sterile pleasure of books and art, enjoying *en amateur*, but not creating?"

Dick Stewart pitched down another match.

"And now, I dare say, it seems strange to you that you should be wishing for the simpler joys of life and home." The priest's voice deepened. "You want to warm both hands before the household fire of life. And you cannot wait, you think—you had a French mother, and that overcomes your Scotch patience, sometimes. Sometimes you are one of the violent, who must take the Kingdom of Heaven by storm."

"Archange!" Stewart was so urgent that he forgot to score the hit. "Don't run me down *too* much! She. . . . she. . . . I suppose your cousin is a sort of ward of yours, isn't she? And you are anxious about her,—and also, for some reason you haven't said, but one that makes me hope, you are anxious about *me*? You believe I care for her sincerely and utterly, don't you?—that I shall never change, never become a brute or a wife-beater or anything like that?"

I think you must believe it, for you have read me so well all this time. And if there's one thing to read in me at all it is that I adore your cousin."

"You have seen her only three times—practically twice only. You have never spoken with her at all. How *can* you love and adore her? You do not in the least understand her heart and mind."

"I do, indeed I do! Of course I do! When one loves one understands."

"Yes," said the Abbé sadly. "I had forgotten that. . . . Stewart, you have said a great truth. When one loves one understands. . . ."

Then silence rose like a wall between the two for a while, and in that interval all the magic of moonlit night came down. Up towards the zenith the round moon climbed, and a blanched unearthly light showered down in flood, to drench and splash with whiteness the Maison and the garden. Whiter than ever the Maison showed, each flower in the garden seemed a lily, each leaf as if fretted out of silver. The trees shone as if brilliant with hoar-frost, and all was argent and luminous. But about the feet of the two men the shadow of the portico fell very black.

Dick Stewart stirred uneasily; then again kept quite still; then, in a while his wicker chair more loudly creaked.

"Archange. . . . Monseigneur, . . ." he said at last, "are you condemning me? I'm afraid you are. You don't think me worthy of your cousin. I'm not, I know I'm not, by a long chalk, but . . . I could try to be, and when I try anything, I usually. . . . Archange, I hoped you would help me . . . to cut the boulder out?"

The broken silence joined itself for a minute. Then, slowly—

"You are unjust to the Comte," the Abbé said. "He dined at the château to-night——"

"He did, by Jove, did he!" Dick Stewart grumbled. "And I was here, confound it!"

"I studied him again" the Abbé went on. "He is anxious to get the château back into the family again. He admires my cousin, of course, but he does not love her, in

the English way of loving before marriage. He is very proud, but he comes of excellent family. He is not a bounder at all."

"Isn't he? Then I beg his pardon, if you say so. You will know—you are a great gentleman, Monseigneur."

"I am not a great gentleman, and I am not Monseigneur, at present," the Abbé said gravely. "I will thank you to forget that title, Stewart. Forget it, till you understand."

"Understand what, sir? . . . *When* shall I understand?" The tone was plaintive.

"To-morrow, perhaps—to-morrow certainly, if ever."

"*If ever?*" More plaintively still Dick Stewart spoke. "That means you have almost made up your mind against me! I don't quite know why you should, you know—I'm not such a terribly bad sort of rotter, after all. I assure you there's something rather decent about me, sometimes."

The Abbé smiled. "If there is," he said, "my cousin will know."

"Know? How can she? How could she, she has seen only the worst of me so far. She saw me act like a cad in the church, and she saw me faint like a milksop, confound it! I'm bound to confess I don't see how she can know there's any good in me at all! I wish I could think she could, but how can she?"

"What did you say just now? You said that when one loves one understands."

"So I did, so I did, but——" Dick Stewart's heart leaped, and he sat up excitedly. "Do you mean. . . No, you can't mean that? You don't mean she cares at all about me?"

"Not yet," the Abbé said. "And she must not, ever."

Dick Stewart leaned back and groaned.

The Abbé leaned forward and began to finger the ranked matches.

"I like you the better, Stewart," he said, his eyes on the matches, "for not supposing it probable that my cousin could care for you. You saw her, lost sight of her, searched for her, and came here at last, which is romantic,—and I suppose every girl is romantic, more

or less. But my cousin is French-bred and convent-trained. What an English girl might properly do she will not."

He paused, and in the silence Dick Stewart sighed; so deeply that the Abbé smiled. "Myself, I do not think the Comte a suitable husband for her," he said. "I detect unhealthiness. But if M. de Grandemaison tells my cousin to marry the Comte, she will."

"Has he—done so?" The words came out with difficulty.

"Not yet. But she understands. And therefore she will not permit her thoughts to turn to another. There is no such wooing and love-making for gently-bred girls here as is allowed in England. Even if my cousin knew you well and cared for you, she would obey her father. She loves him, she loves him more than she admires him, perhaps; but even if she did not love him she would obey him——"

"I don't believe it, I *won't* believe it!" Dick Stewart's heart was saying the while.

"Family honour compels her to obey. He is her father. More than that, he is the Head of our House." The Abbé's manner had changed; unconsciously, perhaps. It had become less cordial, the amenity of it less exquisite, the courtesy of it colder, and his whole bearing more remote.

Dick Stewart felt the change like a chill. "Something has happened, I think," he said. "While you were away at the château. Something has changed you, Abbé—you look as glum as a man in the street giving a beggar a penny when he doesn't want to."

"I have had some talk with my cousin," the Abbé said gravely. "I expected her to have told M. de Grandemaison what she knew of you. She told *me*, it is true, but I think she should have told M. de Grandemaison. It seems that Bonne begged her not to do so, and she promised, until your lameness should be gone."

"Bless the old girl for that!" Dick Stewart cried. "Good old Bonne, I knew she'd befriend me if she could! Curiously enough, though, she was very fierce with me at

first." Then, "Well, and did *you* tell M. de Grandemaison, Monseigneur?" he went on, coldly.

"Monseigneur! I have twice asked you not to call me that!"

"You seem to be riding the high horse of propriety, rather, so I think I ought to call you that."

Keenly the Abbé regarded him. "You are proud," he said. "You would let your pride cast you away, no matter what you wanted. . . . I will get you to give me the present address of Loxton-Phipps. I wish to write to him about you."

"By all means—nothing to conceal, I assure you." And haughtily the address was given.

"Meantime I put you on your honour. Not to seek to woo my cousin. I fear that already——"

"Already?"

"I confess that my cousin has a little surprised me. She asked me not to speak to M. de Grandemaison about your seeing her in London. She wishes to tell him of it herself. That is natural, and right, no doubt, in one respect. If M. de Grandemaison is told we cannot keep you here. But I think we *must* keep you here a while, Mr. Stewart; for other reasons as well as because you are lame. To let you go away at once might . . . well, there are people who know of your coming, and we must consider that. With your English ideas about love and the right of a lover to follow, you have rather infringed our French rules of behaviour. You have asked people about us. I wish you had not felt yourself so justified in asking people the way to Château Royal."

Dick Stewart stiffened. "I asked the way three times only, by-the-by," he said. "From a boy who did not answer, from a woman who did not know, and from a chemineau. But . . . I can go away at once—no, hardly at once, because it is a bit late and I don't know my bearings. But I can go away first thing in the morning—at any rate, as soon as my car gets here."

"That is just what you must not do," the Abbé said. "You hardly understand me—naturally you do not. These are French ideas which I am putting to

you. According to French ideas it will be wiser for you to stay."

"Really I don't in the least understand." Stewart's tone was icy now.

Again the Abbé smiled. "How proud you are!" he said. "But my cousin wishes you to stay, and so do I. I have thought of the possible misunderstanding if you go away abruptly. If you will stay for some days as our honoured guest, the possible misunderstanding about your searching for my cousin may be avoided. . . . Do you now see what I mean? It is French, all this, I acknowledge, but then—we are in France."

Dick Stewart sprang up in horror. "You mean . . . you mean. . . . Oh, but that's the most priestly thing I've seen in you! You mean that if I go away at once people might think. . . . Heavens above, *could* people be so base? Good lord, good lord!"

"You see the danger? And you will stay with us, of course," the Abbé said, more cordially. "Now you must let me leave you awhile. I am going indoors, to write to Loxton-Phipps about you."

Dick Stewart watched the Abbé cross the black-and-white floor to the table, and begin to handle a lamp. A match spluttered, yellow light burst out and diffused itself; a moth went dashing towards the lamp, its eyes like red coals showing. From where he sat Dick Stewart could see the Abbé's bent head and moving fingers illuminated, and could hear the faint noise of the pen. "Writing to Rory for my character," the watcher thought. "I'm not alarmingly anxious. The old chap wouldn't give me away if he could. . . . But why do they want my character? Is it because Consolata has begun to think about me, and . . . Preposterous! No, how could she, yet?"

But that preposterous thought had brought him happiness. "I shall know," he rejoiced, "I shall know by her manner when I see her! And I shall see her to-morrow, and the next day—I shall see her every day, for days! . . . I—I beg your pardon!"

For the Abbé had finished the letter, and had lifted his head and his voice.

"It is understood, then, Stewart—you give me your word of honour? I need not be precise as to what?"

"Confound it, yes!" Dick Stewart grumbled, his rapture suddenly dashed. "Yes, I give my parole!"

XXXIV

"AND now," said the Abbé, coming out to his chair under the portico, "if you will you may offer me a cigarette. We will smoke for ten minutes. Then to bed."

"Bed! The word's an insult to that moon! Look at it, Abbé! The splendid daylight of it, Abbé! Let us be out all night and bask!"

"It will rain before long, however. . . . Listen, you can hear the frogs."

A continuous purring and grating sound was audibly coming out of the charmille from a pond. *Brek-ek-koax—brek-ek-koax!* chirped the chorus of frogs from the slime.

Dick Stewart shivered a little. "I hate the little beasts," he said. "Cold, greasy, mesmeric-eyed. . . . Did you ever dissect one, Abbé? You've dissected me. The worst old Rory can write you about me you know already. How do you find people out? I couldn't reckon up a fellow as you do. . . . I dare say you understand your cousin better still?"

"I have hardly seen her since she was a child; until she came to us here, so few weeks ago. She has been brought up in a convent, and that leaves its mark." He sat awkwardly puffing at the cigarette, as though smoking was not a habit with him, and he was silent awhile.

"Yes?" Dick Stewart said, suggestingly. "Yes? You were talking about your cousin?"

The Abbé smiled at the transparent wish. "My cousin is proud," he said.

"But very sweet and simple!" the lover cried. "I don't mean simple in the silly sense of the word, you know, but——"

"I understand. But, do you know, I think she is not

simple at all. Very complex, *I* think her. Highly imaginative and easily affected."

"Yet unaffected?"

"Of course," the Abbé said, with some hauteur. "My cousin has no need for affectation. And she has too much humour for that. She enjoys the excellent Bonne amazingly. If my cousin did not love her father she would laugh at him when he peacocks. Yet, as she knows why he does it——" The Abbé paused.

Dick Stewart kept silence too, for the time. Then, "Yes, I noticed that," he said. "M. de Grandemaison does peacock rather, doesn't he? But he does it so superbly! I wonder why? You know why, I suppose—it will be part of the secret?"

"Which you may learn to-morrow, perhaps. So we will say nothing more about it now. Lie back, and put your feet up. In surgery rest is always more than half the cure."

"What a man you are, Abbé!" Dick Stewart said, admiringly. "I should think you could make yourself anything you like! *I* couldn't, you know—I'm a good deal of a duffer. But *you*! Why do you hide away here? Why are you not ambitious?"

The Abbé put down his cigarette. "You rather encroach," he said coldly. Then he sat looking out on the garden whiteness, with frowning eyes.

Dick Stewart stirred uneasily. "I beg your pardon, Monseigneur," he said. "My want of tact again! But—if you will forgive me?—do you know what I sometimes have thought? I have thought that the future is to the man who can be both politician and preacher. And if he was a medicine-man too, like yourself—good heavens above, how he could clear the board! There's a man in England called Clifford—but perhaps you don't know of him? You will have heard of General Booth, at any rate? Well now, what might not have happened in England if General Booth had been a politician too? Suppose he had made the Salvation Army a political force, preaching the Sermon on the Mount turned into law, and voting for Christian

Socialism? He could have become the most powerful fellow in England, don't you think? To vote and to preach——"

"Yes," said the Abbé. "If one could preach sincerely." He rose. "Come, you will rest your ankle better in bed." And presently, in the room to which he had conducted his guest, "I shall be sleeping next door to you," he said. "If you should need anything, do not scruple to knock on the wall. . . . You keep your window open, of course? Then I will shut your door after me. . . . Good night!"

But he did not go to his bed in the next room. He went out to the portico again awhile, and stood there musing.

"He did not know—he *could* not know how near to the quick he went! And yet he has the idea, which I thought was mine only. What was it he said? 'The Sermon on the Mount turned into law.' I will put that down."

He went indoors, to the table. He unlocked a drawer and took out a file of papers. Seating himself, with his face to the portico, he pushed the crucifix and the breviary aside, to bring the papers under the light of the lamp. Then he fingered the upper page. At the top of that page appeared the word "Pro"; upon that page he had argued the probabilities of a plan.

This is what he now read:—

"PRO.

"France appears ripe for the establishment of a National Church, detached from Rome.

"The National Church of France must be Catholic and Apostolic, but not Roman. For France as a nation has definitely quarrelled with Rome. A National Church here must be Catholic, Apostolic, and French.

"In the year 1794 half the priests in France were dreaming of a separate and National Church, La Sainte Eglise Gallicane. The time for realizing that dream appears to be at hand.

"About two hundred French priests throw off their orders every year. Most of them would rally to a National Church.

"I think the people of France may be classified in this matter thus:—One million Ultramontanes, believing in the Pope and the Italian system, and three millions openly and bitterly hostile to any Church and to religion in any form. The remaining thirty-six millions appear to consist of:—

"*Gallicans*, who care nothing for the Pope, but need a means of Catholic worship ;

"*Intellectuals*, too refined, and too sceptical of scepticism even, to be antagonistical to religion :

"*Hereditary worshippers*, who are Catholics for family reasons ;

"*Æsthetics*, who need a system which gives them Gothic architecture and Gregorian chants.

"*Professionals*, the priests and other paid officers of the Church.

"*Women*, who worship emotionally and accept any established authority ; and

"*Children*, who worship as women and priests direct. Though Socialism seems to be gaining in France, it could be transformed into Christian Socialism." The Abbé here wrote in the words of Dick Stewart. "'Turning the Sermon on the Mount into law.'

"France is therefore ripe for a religious leader. I am a priest, I could be a National Catholic, and by birth I can claim to be a Leader whom the French people could respect.

"The Leader of a National Church might grasp the temporal power. But——"

The Abbé loosed the paper, and for several minutes sat looking out into the garden through the doorway of the portico. Then, with a sudden gathering of himself together, he turned a page or two, and began again to read:—

"CONTRA.

"But—I do not sufficiently believe. To preach and lead requires great faith, intensely convicted and convicting.

"What do I believe? I could accept St. Benedict's definition of religion—'to love purity, to hate nobody, to have neither jealousy nor envy, to dislike discord and flee

from pride ; daily to fulfil in action the commandments of God.' But is that enough ?

"I read in Lacordaire that 'Whosoever comes to know God and love Him hath nothing to desire and nothing to regret.' If that be true I am not truly religious, for I desire my rights and long for power. Besides, I have a century and more of wrongs to regret.

"'In this world,' says St. Augustine, 'there are two forms of love, the love of God that means denial of self, and the love of self that means denial of God.'

"At different times I feel them both, though one negatives the other.

"If I were truly religious I should be content to live as meanly as the least. But I long to live as proudly as the loftiest. I cannot renounce my blood ; yet without derogation to that I cannot be a saint.

"Also, I have ceased to believe, I am no longer in true communion with the Church Apostolic and Catholic. I believe in the Father, and perhaps in the Son, but the Virgin and the Saints do not occupy my thoughts at all.

"How, then, could I preach and lead ? How through a National Church reach to the Head of the Nation ? Yet to act is a duty, it is the command of my House. Oh for a sign, to tell me what to do ! Oh for a vision, to teach me what to believe ! . . ."

Something drew his gaze. He lifted his eyes ; through the portico doorway he *saw* ; a creepy chill ran over him to the roots of his hair, he felt it crisping around the little circle of the tonsure. Staggering he stood, his hands thrown out repressingly, and with lips that refused all utterance he inaudibly called upon the name of God. . . .

Mon Dieu ! what had it been ? . . . Mon Dieu ! at the call of that high Name it had vanished ! What had it been ? That grey-clad hooded figure, those shut eyes blindly peering in, that seemed to see though they were shut ! That shroud-like hood which fell about the face concealingly. . . . Mon Dieu, *what had it been ?*

XXXV

TREMBLING, the Abbé stole to his bed, and the great pageant of the night went on. Moonlight faded awhile, the flock of clouds huddled their fleeces together like sheep before an impending storm; a tempest of rain descended, drenching the forest, the little idle garden, and the château. Then stars showed out again, more brilliantly, like flowers in the great garden of the firmament that rain had washed into new radiance; the moon sloped downwards swiftly, a new twilight diffused, dawn presently lit the lantern of the sky, and day in self-sufficient glory came, with hot contempt of stars. Meanwhile Dick Stewart lay oblivious, alike of the midnight walk of Joseph Leroux, the midnight apparition in the portico—

“And the great pageant of the passing night.”

Unconscious of all he lay, in the serene and perfect egotism of sleep. It was ten o' clock that Saturday morning before he stirred.

He stirred, yawned, threw up his arms stretchingly, and stared about him, not for the moment remembering and realizing where he was. He rose and dressed, and at the sound he made the pale Abbé looked kindly in. Then there was breakfast, delightfully leisurely and lazy breakfast, in the sunlight and shade of the portico, with freshened scents wandering in from the flowers and the leaves; then tobacco, while the pale Abbé talked distractedly, and the rested foot was rested more. All the garden glanced and glittered, shining like pargetted silver and emerald and gold in the gaiety and gleaming of the day. *Could* any horror of the night have entered there, into a garden so

light and idle, into a Maison still magnetic with old love? . . .

And then, about eleven, what seemed the buzz and bourdon of a giant locust was suddenly audible; the summoned automobile had arrived from Limoges. M. de Grandemaison, sitting on his terrace, had commanded it on into the charmille, it came tuff-tuffing up to the gate of the garden, and "Thanks be for fresh togs!" Dick Stewart presently said. "Pedestrianizing would be scrump-tious, Abbé, if one could take a laundress about with one, and her tub, and a tailor's man with his goose in a barrow to press one's things *comme il faut*! . . . That's right, Dupont," he said to the chauffeur, "pile the other bags against the wall. . . . There, I can cut a decent figure now, Archange, when I call on your noble uncle this afternoon!"

But there were hours to wait for that, and Stewart passed the time till lunch in happy thoughts and hopeful; all his buoyancy of mind had returned to him, he was certain of wooing and wedding Consolata now. Bah to the forebodings and forebiddings of Archange! . . . Then, after lunch, left alone, for the Abbé was gone to the château, the lover passed the hours in the company of John Evelyn and tobacco; until he unexpectedly found himself favoured by the company of Bonne.

"Afternoon, sir!" she said. "Thought I'd come and see you a bit, that's all," she added, with something very much like a blush.

"Good idea of yours, Bonne," said Dick Stewart, getting up out of his chair, and dangling his foot. "Why didn't you come before?"

"Now you just sit down again, Mr. Bendick, sir—don't you go and be stupid, getting up like that when you're lame! I know what it is when I has skyattics, so there now! I've brought you a broom, that's all."

"So you have, so you have!" said Dick Stewart, regarding the article critically. "A very fine broom too. A new one, isn't it? But what do you suppose I can do with a broom? I assure I never swept anything in my life."

"Yes, sir, it's a new 'un," Bonne said. "I keeps a stock of 'em. But as for your going and sweeping d'you think I'd let you, evens if you could? No, but—if you turns it upside down it'll do for a crutch, that's all!"

"So it will!" Dick Stewart cried. "Brilliant idea! I say, Bonne, how clever you are! Thank you, Bonne! . . . A bit long for a crutch, though, don't you think?" He was trying it. "Want's the knob cutting off. Shall you mind if I——?" He took out his pocket-knife.

"I've give it you, that's all," said Bonne. "If you'll accept of it kindly, Mr. Bendick, sir. Cut it as much as you like, sir. It isn't no favourite o' mine, 'cause it's new!"

"And you only like the old, eh?" He was cutting at the top of the broomstick.

"Only likes the old?" said Bonne. "No, I loves the young 'uns. Young Missus, d'you think I don't love *her*?"

"I love her, too," said Dick Stewart, with sudden gravity. "Bonne—you know I love her, don't you?"

"Sh' just think you do!" said Bonne. "You'd be a funny young 'un if you didn't, that's all!"

"Bonne? . . . I say, Bonne? . . . Do you think there's any hope for me?"

"I dunno, sir. Maybe. . . . I hope there's hope!"

"God bless you, Bonne, for saying that! Bonne, you're no end of a brick! Bonne, I'd like to kiss you for that! Stoop over me, Bonne—embrace me like a mother!"

She flushed. "I ain't no mother," she said. "Never was. Nor never shan't be now." Sadly she said it. "Madame's been my baby, that's all. And if that there Conter Doo takes her away——"

"*Madame*?" he said inquiringly. "Why do you call her Madame? Good Heavens, Bonne, you don't mean to say now that she's Madame R.?"

"Her *is*—that's her proper name, only shortened. Didn't I tell you her was, the very first?" Bonne said, offendedly.

"But if she *is* Madame R. . . . Oh, I don't understand your confounded mysteries here one bit," he cried

irritably. "You are all in a league together, to bewilder a fellow! . . . If she is Madame R. there can be no hope for me, or the Comte either, can there? Unless. . . . You don't mean to say she's a widow?"

"No, her ain't!" Bonne said indignantly. "Who said her was? How could her, and her only just out of convints and places?"

"But—if she is Madame R.—and not a widow. . . . Oh, I give it up, it's too much for my brains. . . . Bonne, you don't mean to suggest that she . . . that she would? . . . Confound you, Bonne, how can the Comte take her away if she's Madame R. and not a widow? She wouldn't, she wouldn't! Haven't I seen her—don't I know the look in her eyes!"

"Now don't you go and shake my own broom at me—leastways, what used to be my own—not at me like that, so there now! I haven't done nothing as deserves brooming for, have I? I didn't expect it of you, sir—here's me as has been saying as you was as nice a young gent as ever was, and now you're going and brooming me, are you, with my own broom—leastways, as *was* my own broom, and. . . . Afternoon, sir; I didn't expect it of you, that's all!"

"Bonne! Come back, Bonne!" But stolid, and pretending to be offended, she was moving off, she was gone.

He put the broom under his armpit, and swung himself along the path, to the gate.

"Bonne, Bonne! Come back!" But she did not turn. "Bonne, *Bonne*, I say! . . . Ah well, never mind, I'll see you this afternoon. I'm coming to the château this afternoon, twenty minutes past four!"

She turned at that, and, with a good-humoured grin on her face, she waved a hand.

At four o'clock that afternoon Dick Stewart, arrayed in raiment fit for the Row, and gripping the broomstick with a grey-gloved hand, swung himself along through the charmille towards the château. He came to the terrace and found Bonne awaiting him there.

"He's expecting of you, sir," she said. "He's expecting of you in the Libery. Just you go and come along o' me."

"What shall I do with this confounded thing?" He held out the broom.

"'Tisn't confounded!" said Bonne. "Give it me!" She took it fondlingly. "I expect it'll be all right here." She made it lean against the portal. "Unless that there impident Peter Neigh—" She looked towards the archway. "It'll frighten him, though—he'll expect I'm somewhere about if he sees it. . . . Now then, sir, don't go and stand there like a baby!—Come along of me!"

He followed her meekly into the hall of the château, and then through doorway after doorway into room after room. His eyes roved everywhere, but sought in vain.

"Shan't I see her, Bonne?" he whispered. "I say, Bonne—you've forgiven me, haven't you? You're going to take me to Madame R."

"Go along of you, sir," she said reproachfully. "As if it wasn't Seer you've come for, not her! Hush!" She tapped at a closed door.

"Entrez!" said a pompous voice.

Bonne pushed the door open and pushed her guest within.

"Mr. Fancy Bendick, steward, Seer!" she announced. Then, "Speak up at him—he won't eat nobody!" she whispered; and as the door clicked back behind him Dick Stewart found himself in the presence of M. de Grandemaison, alone.

"Aha, young sir!" said M. de Grandemaison, majestically waving him a salute. "You have come to offer your—ah—homage, we suppose? Be at your ease, young sir—we will receive you in a moment." M. de Grandemaison stooped to a portfolio that yawned open on a stand, and he showed his visitor the imposing breadth of his back. M. de Grandemaison selected a mounted print, drew it forth from the portfolio, held it to the light, admired it, and ranged it with others already there, on a ledge of the wainscoted wall. Then he turned. "So you have come,

young sir—you find that you can—ah—comfortably perambulate?”

Dick Stewart smiled, for the last word suggested a certain vehicle, himself within it and Bonne at the handle behind. But—

“Sir, your most obedient grateful servant!” he said. “I have called to pay my respects, and to thank you for——”

“A moment—one moment!” A lordly wave of the hand arrested the thanks. During several moments M. de Grandemaison took out and deposited on the wainscot ledge quite a row of mounted prints. “Always finish one thing at a time, young sir,” he said. “Resume!”

Dick Stewart resumed. “Sir, as I said, I am your grateful and obedient servant.” He bowed. He could not but speak formally and ceremoniously, for ceremony seemed imperative in the presence of M. de Grandemaison; form and formal address seemed to be in the very air he breathed. “Sir, I am truly grateful for your hospitality. You received me, a most unexpected and unwarranted guest. Sir, I shall never forget how much I owe——” He paused; he had been eyeing the prints and the picture-lover in him was aroused; he broke off, and he broke the ice. “Heavens above, sir, what splendid impressions! Prout colour-prints, aren’t they, sir? And Cotman etchings? Yes, and Turner plates! And all of them scenes in France!”

M. de Grandemaison peacocked. “Yes, young sir—all of France—all of this beautiful—ah—realm. France at the—ah—epoch when our family——” But here M. de Grandemaison checked himself, paused markedly, and uttered his pompous cough.

Dick Stewart had begun to handle the prints. “Why, these are from Turner’s Annual Tour. Six of them. But he did twenty-two of the Loire?”

“We have the others in our portfolio, young sir.”

“Brilliant impressions, too,” Dick Stewart cried delightedly. “Proofs. This is Higham’s plate of Rouen Cathedral! And this—yes, Brandard’s Château Gaillard. And—yes, actually, Cousen’s Calais Pier! Sir, these are lovely and priceless. But that of course you know?”

"We collected them in London," M. de Grandemaison said. "It—ah—beguiled our exile there." He stooped to the portfolio again. "Do you—ah—recognize this lithograph of Harding's?"

"I should think I do!" cried Stewart, quite exempt from form and ceremonial by this. "Rouen itself! . . . Sir, I envy you, sir, I could positively steal these from you. Sir, if I were not your guest I would—I beg your pardon."

"You would what, young sir?"

"Bid, I was going to say. But I beg your pardon for that."

M. de Grandemaison had drawn himself up. "Sir, you would bid, would you? You would—ah—bid perhaps a thousand pounds? Sir, we do not sell—we will never part from them—they are part of our—ah—family home!"

Emotion sounded in the pompous old voice, ennobling it, and Dick Stewart softened. Nostalgia for a France so fair, a patrie so delectable, must often have saddened this old gentleman, through years of drab exile in a sordid Hatton Garden. A Frenchman is the unhappiest of exiles; France is the home and Mecca towards which he nightly turns his face. And the distant France of M. de Grandemaison had been the old France, that delightful ruinous old France of ninety years ago, the France which had survived the storm of Revolution and Empire. The France of 1820; the crumbling Gothic or Renaissance wall, the châteaux not yet healed of wounds, the old costumes still worn, the crowds of worshippers still devout, the France that had been, and still was awhile, but never more can be.

"It was *our* France, that," M. de Grandemaison said. "Your English artists adored it. There are no such pictures as theirs, young sir, for showing what our unhappy realm used to be. Young sir, your—ah—admiration touches us—we believe that you love our France."

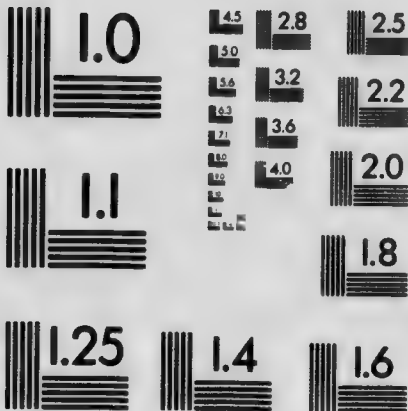
"I do indeed, sir! I've motored over such a lot of it. I like the French so well, too. Sir, France seems a second patrie to me—my mother was French, I——"

M. de Grandemaison put out a chubby white hand, and patted this highly appreciative young sir on the shoulder.



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"Mr.—ah—Stewart," he said, "we like you. We consider you worthy to witness our—ah—principal treasure. . . . Yes, you *shall* see it. Follow us, young sir!"

Back past door after door, into the hall again, and then into the other wing of the chateau. Dick Stewart proceeded, in the wake of the portly seigneur of it all, and presently he came into a room of state, the dining-hall of the chateau. This room was tapestried, there was but one painted picture in it, and that hung enshrined in the place of honour, within the panelled mantel over the cavernous hearth. A curtain of black velvet sown with silver lilies hid the picture, and reverently M. de Grandemaison touched the sumptuous folds.

"Young sir," he said, in almost a whisper, "we shall show you a picture which one of your English—ah—artists with the French name of Chalon painted—it is the portrait of our unhappiest ancestor. Behold!"

The curtain rang along its rod, and the picture stolen from Saumur was revealed.

XXXVI

DISMISSED from the presence of M. de Grandemaison by a benevolent wave of the hand, Dick Stewart came out upon the terrace bewildered and, as he told himself, "staggered, quite staggered!" And yet, as he seated himself there awhile, "I knew it, I was sure of it!" he reflected, with a kind of pride and satisfaction that his presentiment at Saumur had come true. But in with these considerations dismay soon mixed itself, the dismay with which a candid and unpremeditated honesty finds itself involved with its opposite. "And I'm to dine with the thieving old jackdaw of a bird to-night," he reflected. For "You will dine with us to-night, young sir," M. de Grandemaison had said. "At seven precisely. Till then our nephew will—ah——" The young sir had stammered something and retreated; out into the hall and under the solemn gaze of the six great portraits the staggered Englishman had gone. And now——

"A thief! Consolata's father is a thief!" he was saying to himself, over and over again. "The audacity, though—the splendid kleptomania of it!" Then he smiled; imagination had shown him the portly M. de Grandemaison clambering out of a window in the town-hall at Saumur, an angular old painting under his podgy arm. "And away he'd go peacocking with his booty!"

Yet no—of course not, no!—the old gentleman would never steal the thing himself; some accomplished Parisian burglar must have been employed, Dick Stewart reflected. Yet a thief, all the same, was M. de Grandemaison—thief and receiver too. "The poor girl—if she knows!"

Consolata's father a "fence," a receiver, and vicariously a thief! With that renewed reflection came a vaguer suggestion of something else that he had heard of lately of

the same kind ; some other vicarious theft ? . . . Yes, that was it ; Shott had talked about it, Shott had told him of it at the wayside inn ! The "chief bloke" in the "pinching" which Shott had spoken about would be M. de Grandemaison himself, of course ! It was to Château Royal that the equitable Shott had been journeying from Boulogne, it was M. de Grandemaison whom Shott was after ! . . . Doubly a fence and receiver, then—culprit both in England and France ! And tracked by a Shott, who meant to make him disgorge. And the father of Consolata all the time, the head of their House, and the father of the sweetest girl alive !

"Oh, it's the deuce, the very deuce !" Dick Stewart got up from the chair and went hobbling down the steps and along the gravel. "And she knows of it, perhaps !" Yes, she would know of it, and that must be why she seemed so unhappy at her father's summons, that day in the church !

Pride, pride for himself and the fear of stigma for himself, battled with him awhile ; he loved her dearly, but—the daughter of a thief, of a *thief* ! Then shame came in a flush and a flood, shame at himself, shame for himself, that pride should have suggested cowardice to him, that self-opinion should for a moment have been able to struggle with love. If she knew—if she *did* know—then all the more need for his sympathy and help. "If I dare hint it to her !" he thought. "If I could go to her ! If only I could come across Bonne anywhere ? . . . Oh luck, gorgeous luck !"

For he had come to the edge of the lawn which spread between the château and the charmille, and there stood Bonne as if awaiting ! His spirits went up with a bound, and "Fairest of the ripe unwedded," he cried, "I'm awfully glad to see you !"

"Where's your broom, Mr. Fancy Bendick, sir ?" said she.

"My broom ?" he asked, forgettingly.

"Your crutch as I give you, sir ? You don't take very much care of it, do you ? Now don't you go and walk not another step, not till I brings it to you, that's all ! Lef' it

in the Shatter somewheres, I expect ! ” And when she was back with him again, the broom in her hand, “ Now then, sir,” she commanded, “ just you put that under your elber and show a bit o’ sense ! ”

“ Bonne,” he said—“ Bo-onne,” he stammered. “ It wasn’t exercise I wanted, it was you. I’ve something to ask you, Bonne. Tell me, has a man, an Englishman, been here about anything ? Man called Shott ? Eccentric sort of fellow—talks about equity ? ”

Bonne’s face went as red as the bricks of the château. “ What do *you* think ! ” she said angrily. “ ‘Pears you knows him, that’s all ! As if we was going ard having any of *his* impurence ! And what’re you wanting to know for,—no business of yours, I suppose ? ”

“ Bonne, he has—he has been here, confound him ! I say, Bonne, if he comes again—— ”

“ He won’t, not he ! I give him such a doing.”

“ But if he does, Bonne ? He mustn’t see anybody. He mustn’t see M. de Grandemaison.”

“ He has,” said Bonne. “ And went away like a dog with no wag to his tail, that’s all ? What do you happen to go and know about him ? ”

“ Bonne ! ” he said, “ best of all Bonnes, *she* mustn’t know ! ”

“ Her don’t, sir—not whatever it is, her don’t ! What’s ridiculous Shotts want coming here for ? ” she went on angrily, her hands moving as though they wielded a broom. “ It’s like his impurence ! I’ll disgeorge him if he comes again, you see if I don’t, that’s all ! ”

“ Bonne,” he said again, “ there’s something very queer about all this, Bonne. Your young mistress may need help—protection even, perhaps.”

“ And what d’you think *I’m* here for, then ? ” she said hotly. “ Ah, Mr. Bendick, sir, if you only know’d what goings on there is in this here Shatter, you’d—— ” Aggravatingly she paused.

“ I’d what, Bonne ? ”

“ Want to perfect her more nor you does, that’s all ! ”

“ Bonne,” he said earnestly, “ you know that I love her, don’t you ? ”

Bonne nodded twice.

"You know that I can't help loving her?"

Bonne nodded three or four times.

"And you believe that nothing—no shame for her father, or anything—could make me leave off loving her, don't you?"

"Sh' think not!" said Bonne, "you couldn't help loving her, not if you tried ever so!"

"I've had to promise M. Archange that I won't tell her I love her, Bonne—stupid thing to promise, yet I had to. . . . But Bonne, do you think I might see her a minute or two, just now?"

Bonne looked at him solemnly a moment, then allowed her large smile to brighten her face.

"Come along, sir," she said briskly. "Her's in the shrub'ry, banc de julep—now then, use your crutch, dot and carry one—that's it! Come along over the lorn. . . . Stop, stop, sir, you'll lame yourself again, going that fast!"

"It's Mr. Fancy Bendick come to see you, deary," said Bonne, when they stood before the banc de Julie.

Consolata looked up from her book; eyes met and smiled.

"Mademoiselle de Grandemaison, my name is Francis Benedick Stewart," he said.

Consolata drew her skirt aside, to make room on the bench.

"You must be tired, Mr. Stewart," she said. "Do you think you should walk about, just yet? Sit," she went on. "You may faint again, unless you do."

Dick Stewart grimaced as he sank upon the bench. "Faint again!" he said disgustedly. "I assure you, Mademoiselle——"

He paused, for the violet-sapphire eyes were regarding him questioningly.

"Madame, I mean," he stammered; but the violet-sapphire eyes looked surprise.

"Madame—Madem—oh, I don't know," he went on despairingly. "Anyhow, I hope you don't suppose me a milksop. I give you my word, I never fainted in my life till yesterday, and why in the world I should have fainted

then I can't understand. I am afraid I have been ill-mannered in other ways, though, often. I hope you believe that I have never forgiven myself for my intrusion that day in the church."

She held her head more proudly. "Sir," she said, "this is the first time I have spoken with you. I did not know you in London. . . . Bonne, will you go to the stables, if you please, and order Mr. Stewart's automobile to come for him here. . . . You should have used it instead of Bonne's broom, Mr. Stewart," she went on. "You are still rather lame. Do you not think you should ride to the Maison at once, and rest your foot there?"

"But Madem—Madame—I am to dine at the château to-night," he said.

"I will go to the stables myself, Bonne," she said quickly, "for the machine. Will you remain here with Mr. Stewart, till the auto comes?"

The exquisite grace and the sweet pride of her farewell, he thought, when she had bowed to him and was moving away across the lawn. The yacht-like gait, the calm distinction, the lenient repression of him! How perfectly she had dismissed him, by quitting him, with a pretext for quitting him so apt and excellent, so courteous and kind!

"Bonne!" he cried passionately as he watched her out of hearing, "Bonne, she'll never care for me! I'm not worth her caring for, that's the truth of it, and the worst of it, old girl!"

"Now don't you go and talk no such nonsense, sir," said Bonne. "And none of your old girls, either! Not so old as you'd think, perhaps, so there!"

He did not apologize; he did not answer; he was gazing and reflecting. From the *banc de Julie* the château, its grounds and all its appurtenances, could be seen lying broad and low in a picture all sun-warmed, all amber with the golden glow of a Claude; the lawns, the garden with its turreted dovecot, the vine-wreathed fruit-trees, the meandering paths statue-haunted, the firs and tall laurels and magnolias that cast dark-green shadows, with splashes of intense yellow light between. Cane-clusters waived, maize grew in ornamental patches, a filbert-grove stretched

away to an empty warren, a row of crooked quince trees marked the line of the filled-in moat that once fed the fish-pond, near which stood, alder-shaded, a ruined bird-decoy, round which the orioles and jays fluttered unafraid. Enclosing most of this stood the high trim hedge of the char-mille. Beautiful with colour, calm with age, stately with symmetry, and touched with all the dignity and distinction that decay and years at their first coming can give, were this château and the demesne; this Château X, this Château Mysterious, this Château d'Ou to which in ignorance and errant enterprise Dick Stewart had come. And now there seemed something high and reserved and out of reach about it all, and he felt the impression.

"She'll never have me, Bonne—how could she? She ought to be a Queen." He despaired again.

"Now don't you go and talk no such nonsense, Mr. Bendick, sir," again said Bonne. "You stick up your poor foot and rest your poor mind, that's all!"

Then over the turf to them the automobile came running, preposterously modern and unsentimental, incoherently out of keeping with that scene, abominably practical and new.

It was not quite seven o'clock that evening when Dick Stewart entered the dining-hall of the château. That he in evening dress and the Abbé in a silken cassock should have come motoring up to the terrace had seemed to him absurd; those were no costumes for motoring in; and, moreover, the ride had been so short. But "To please M. de Grandemaison," the Abbé had said. "Your automobile gives you importance in his eyes. The broom would never do for a State occasion."

"You are to learn our secret to-night, too," the Abbé presently went on; "you must listen to it in broadcloth and fine linen. I opposed your learning it, but M. de Grandemaison insists; he considers that your descent entitles you to be told. You have won upon him wonderfully, Stewart; as I dare say you do with most people. We can trust to your honour and discretion?"

"Of course you can!" said Dick Stewart emphatically.

"But what is this wonderful secret? If it's anything short of felony——"

The Abbé regarded him coldly. "Have you supposed it anything disgraceful?"

"How could I? Why should I?"

"Be prepared for something very unusual, Stewart. Did Loxton-Phipps never tell you anything?"

"He never mentioned you—I never heard the name of Grandemaison till I came here. I can't think why Rory never talked of you, since he knew you so well. I suppose there must have been some sort of a quarrel, wasn't there?"

"Hush!" said the Abbé, "here is Bonne."

They had entered the hall at the château, and there, fearfully and wonderfully arrayed, stood Bonne, a gorgeous spectacle; looking squarer than ever, perhaps, but square in satin and laces, hung with gold chains, studded with gold brooches, and tall with feathers, ostrich-feathers that lifted, curved and drooped above her head. She curtsied to the Abbé, and the Abbé nodded and passed on; but Dick Stewart stood staring.

"My word and soul alive, Bonne," he said at last, "aren't you a swell?"

She grinned her satisfaction. "Ain't I, too?" she said. "Sh' think I am, that's all. But I'd ought to, you know, Mr. Bendick, sir—I'm a Dam doo Pally now."

"You're a—*what*, Bonne?"

"Oh, go along of you in, sir,—foller Mr. Arkans. . . . I can't stop here talking to you, I got to fetch my beauty."

"Fetch your beauty, Bonne? You've got it with you now, Bonne!"

"Fetch my deary, I means," she said, with that awkward blush of hers again, at the compliment. "Go along in with you, sir. Law, how you'll be surprised by-and-by! More nor ever you was in your born days, that's all!"

"And now for the secret," he thought, as he passed into the dining hall. Candles lit the glittering table, and candles stood on the mantel before the portrait that had

come from Saumur; the curtain had been drawn aside, and the almond-shaped flames burned before the picture as if it were an altar-piece. The Abbé himself stood before the portrait, looking at it; perhaps he was thinking that it represented a dull fat man of forty; yet he bent his head before it, as if in church at an altar indeed. And to Dick Stewart the memory of the telegram returned, "Consolata awaited Château Royal now a shrine."

"Archange can't know!" he reflected; surely the Abbé could not know how that picture had been acquired? He could not know that the portrait he seemed almost to worship had been stolen, and was wept for by an old curator in a skull cap at Saumur?

There is magic in a steady thoughtful gaze; it transforms and unrealizes; suddenly a sense of unreality came over what Stewart saw, and upon himself. "I'm going to be queer again, confound it!" he thought irritably, for the room seemed to waver and swim and reel. The dusky lights, the brown dimness in the corners and recesses, the faded tapestries purple and bronze-green, the dark wainscoting, the priest with his silken robe of shimmering blackness, and his old-fashioned face clear-cut and white and standing out as if carved in ivory, the dull unvarnished portrait staring blankly down, and the pale little almonds of candle-light reflected in vessels of silver and glass and silvery old porcelain—all this seemed unreal and fantastic, ancient and distant, part of the past. Yet here was Stewart himself, dressed in the most modern garb that Cork Street could furnish for a dining-out guest of all this stately ancients; for the guest in a château of Mr. Knibbs, dealer, of Hatton Garden next door to Leather Lane! Oh, preposterous! it could not be real, it was absurdly a dream!

A voice cut into the dream. "Room!" said the voice of Tronk. Tronk, splendid in a rich livery, with the white shoulder knot and the hanging brandebourgs of an old-fashioned maitre d'hôtel, had flung the folding doors open in lordly style. "Room!" he mouthed again. "Silence! Madame Royale comes!"

Dick Stewart straightened himself and steadied himself;

then he bowed low. And again the room seemed to swim, again the sense of unreality came over him and dazed him ; for into the swimming room had sailed a Princess ; proud and graceful and royal, yet pale, pale as if ghostly and herself unreal too ; pale with a pearly robe, pale with a fair face too proud to flush and yet troubled, pale with eyelids that drooped upon a trembling gaze bent down ; and yet stately with great calmness and dignity, proud in her sweetness and sweet in her pride.

Madame Royale ! *Madame R*— ! Dick Stewart gasped. For this was Consolata, this was the "one fair daughter" of Mr. Knibbs, dealer, this was the sweetest girl alive whom he loved, loved, loved ! And behind her, carrying her train, came Bonne the *Dam doo Pally*. "Yes, of course !" Dick Stewart told himself with a jerk, "*Dame du Palais*, of course"—*Comtesse Bonne*, *Dame du Palais*, late general servant and housekeeper at No. 11A, Hutton Garden, next door to Leather Lane !

Oh, this was midsummer madness, this was the realm of dreams and fantasies which he had entered ! And yet. . . . He bent above the white little hand of Consolata, *Madame Royale*—he murmured something—what he said, what words he found in that moment he never remembered—he felt that small proud hand tremble as, dazed, thrown back into another century and its courtly usage, he touched the hand of *Madame Royale* with his lips. Then he straightened and steadied himself again, frowned at Bonne, who was grinning in a manner unbecoming a *Dame du Palais* and turned an angry glance of interrogation upon *abbé Archange*. "What does this mean ? What the devil does *this* mean, confound you ?" that glance was meant to say ; but the *Abbé* did not answer it, or even note it ; the *Abbé* was fixedly regarding the doorway ; the *Abbé* stood as if at 'tention, in an attitude that reminded Dick Stewart of Mr. Robert Shott.

Dick Stewart's own gaze went following the *Abbé*. Between the folding doors he could see into the ante-room. Into the ante-room from the hall came Tronk, holding himself bendingly and walking backwards. Lifted in Tronk's hand was a girandole of six candles, that flicker-

as he moved. Behind that, beyond the candles and illuminated by them, came a lordly figure, majestically treading, stately in port and gait, magnificent in costume, and proud, almost insufferably proud in mien.

"Room there!" thundered Tronk as he reached the doorway, then turned and stood humbly aside. "Silence! His Majesty! The King of France and Navarre!"

XXXVII

WIDE awake an hour at midnight Dick Stewart lay in the little room at the Abbaye where the window stood wide open; still awake and still pondering, though the Abbé had bidden him good-night soon after eleven. "Confound the thing!" Dick Stewart was muttering, every now and then; though the thing seem so unreal and fantastic that to confound it was hardly worth while, he reflected after each exclamation. But the thing as a whole, he meant; certain parts of it had been real enough, so real as to be repugnant. For example, he, Dick Stewart, Englishman—Briton, anyhow—had actually kissed a fat Frenchman's hand! "Confound the thing!"

True it was that Consolata had kissed that hand a moment or two earlier, no doubt; and Stewart had taken care to touch just the spot on the middle knuckle of the middle finger where he had seen those daughterly sweet lips of her for a moment rest. "I kissed her kiss—I didn't kiss the old peacock!" he said to himself now by way of palliation, as he tossed about in bed. None the less, he had kissed a fat Frenchman's hand, and he had also addressed a retired diamond-dealer from Hatton Garden as "Sire."

"Sire! Sire! . . . It had been preposterous; it had been so pitiful, it had been painful almost, to watch the pomposity and royal assumption of the old gentleman hailing from the vicinity of Leather Lane. Sire! The old gentleman from the vicinity of Leather Lane had expressly claimed a lineal and direct descent from Louis le Soleil. "We are the son of Louis," he had declared, over the soup; "we are France!" And Stewart had thought of the page in old John Evelyn's *Kalendarium* which describes the progress of Louis le Soleil, the page he had read in the twilight

in the garden. Sire ! The title that Richelieu and Rohan, Colbert and Choiseul, Rochefoucauld and St. Simon had used, in reverence, loyalty, or mouth-honour,—Sire !—Seer, as Bonne said it—he, Dick Stewart, proud and an Englishman, had called a Mr. Knibbs, Dealer, by the august and Royal name of Sire !

If to use that name implied sonship, however, it might also imply son-in-law-ship, may be ? Yet how terribly unlikely ? If Consolata would permit him to woo her, and if Archange gave him back his parole in that, and if his wooing should win, how terribly unlikely that a father who thought himself a king would give to Dick Stewart, an Englishman, a daughter called and considered Madame Royale, the Princess Royal of France. “One thing to the good, anyhow,” he thought, as he tossed over in his bed, “thank goodness I know what to call her now !” The mystery as to “Madame R.” had been solved. “I knew it !” he murmured, “I knew it from the first, by her eyes.”

When she had sailed into the dining-hall, yacht-like, her silken array all billowing, with Bonne grotesque as maid-of-honour and Dame du Palais, bunching up the train in her ungair'ly gloved hands, Dick Stewart was glad to remember that he had not flinched, at that moment ; he had straightened and steadied himself against the shock. And yet, upon the fair bosom which in courtly fashion must glow revealed, he had spied a piece of stolen property ; Consolata was wearing the spoils of theft ; gleaming upon the fair young bosom lay a diamond-studded miniature of Queen Marie Antoinette. Hardly for a moment had he gazed at it, lest he should be thought to be gazing at the flushed whiteness upon which it heaved ; but in that moment he had known that the sparkling little portrait must be the booty for which a certain honest burglar (to quote Mr. Shott) had got some fifty quid and a good deal of quod. “The quid pro quod, in fact,” Stewart jested dismally, as he rolled over again. “Confound this sleeplessness—why do I go on thinking it all over and over again ? Oh, confound the whole preposterous thing !” the whole coil and imbroglio of hopeless love and cunning theft and pompous assumption.

"*She* is Royal enough," he reflected. "Fit for any throne." But as for the rest of the affair, why, it was simply lunatical. "Maniacs I said they were, the minute I first heard Tronk call the Abbé Monseigneur ! . . . Did I, though ?" No, he remembered that at first it had not seemed improbable that the Abbé should be a Bishop ; it was a little later than that when the suspicion that Château Royal might be a madhouse first occurred to his mind. "Monseigneur" in this case meant "Prince Royal," of course, and—"Oh, yes, I'll allow that he might pass muster for that. As for the old peacock, however. . . ."

The receiver of stolen goods and inciter to burglary had entered the dining-hall arrayed in the costume of Louis Quinze ; powdered wig and ribboned queue, cravat of lawn, coat of violet-coloured silk, breeches of sombre velvet, hose of shining black, silver buckles, rapier in a white sheath, large cordon of blue moiré across his ample chest. Treading and bearing himself in magnificent fashion, his left hand held behind his back, his right hand toying with the great Order of the Saint-Esprit that, flamboyant with the outstretched wings of the Dove done in diamonds, flashed above his heart, M. de Grandemaison had advanced ; no actor at the Comédie Française could ever more splendidly impersonate a Bourbon. His raised foot pointed, his head superbly thrown back, and his double-chin showing above his embroidered vest that was outpushed in a noble curve, he had entered, royally enough ; tall, massive, portly, well-shaven, well-powdered, he had looked the florid Bourbon type to a tittle, to a T. And this had been no actor's entrance to Consolata, to the Abbé, to Bonne ; Consolata and Bonne had almost knelt, so low their curtsies ; the Abbé himself had almost knelt, so low his bow. M. de Grandemaison was peacocking worse than ever, but his nephew did not check him ; and in that old room amidst that mimic court the peacocking seemed in place.

"Rise, our daughter—rise, nephew—rise, Comtesse." With benevolent majesty M. de Grandemaison had so commanded, holding out his hand for his daughter's kiss. Then he had turned to the guest. "M. le Prince de Stuart"—Dick Stewart had winced—"we present

you to Antoinette Marie Consolata, Madame Royale de France ! ”

M. le Prince de Stuart ! Oh, the whole scene had been too fantastic, too lunatical, too unreal. “Actually dubbing *Bonne a Comtesse*, into the bargain ! And me a Prince ! Great heavens above ! Confound the whole thing ! ” For it had made his faint hopes less hopeful still, it had set Consolata higher above him and more removed than ever. And it was all so idiotically and insanely assumptive and inept. Yet was not that itself a Bourbon characteristic ?

Suppose the Grandemaison legend should be true, however ? Why not ? As the curator at Saumur had said, no historian now accepted unquestioningly the statement that Charles Louis de Bourbon, Duc de Normandie and Dauphin, the orphaned only son of Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette, *did* die in the Temple prison at Paris in the year 1795. There was much to show that somehow and somewhither the poor lad had been enabled to escape. If the heir to the throne of all the Capets *did* die in prison on the 8th of June, 1795, why two days later should the Thermidorian Government issue the command “Pursue the son of Capet on all the roads of France ? ” Why, when the Restoration came, did the Pope forbid Masses for the soul of the Dauphin to be said, if the Dauphin was then dead ? Why was no monument erected to the lad’s memory by Louis XVIII., his uncle who came to the throne ? And why on the marbles in the *Chapelle Expiatoire* was there no reference to the boy ?

“Because he escaped. Because they knew that he still lived,” M. de Grandemaison had said. “That,”—he pointed to the portrait thieved from Saumur—“is his portrait. It is the portrait of our—ah—sainted Grandsire. He was truly King of France, as we are, though he did not actually reign. Like Bonaparte, also, Louis XVIII. and Charles X. were—ah—usurpers, for our Grandsire lived. Louis Philippe was also usurper, for our royal father lived at the time. The—ah—so-called Comte de Paris and the so-called House of Orleans were never in the—ah—legitimate line. For *we* live, and we are King. We shall perhaps—ah—expire as our sire and grandsire did, unacknowledged, and—

ah—martyrs to neglect by our misguided subjects, but—ah—we are King, all the same ! ”

Bubbling over with the desire to acquaint the Englishman with his dignity he had been, from the first, and now the secret was out he peacocked more than ever. He had come to consider that to play at being King was almost equivalent to Kingship itself, and he was the first of his family to enjoy that happy piece of self-deception. For France had cared no rap about the Grandemaçons, and no rap would France ever care. France had cared no rap for any of the several Pretenders who had claimed to be the escaped and grown-up Dauphin or his heirs. There had been Pretender Hervagault—France had nothing cared ; there had been Pretender Bruneau—France had hardly smiled ; There had been Pretender Eleazar Williams—France had shrugged her shoulders ; there had been Pretender Richemond—France had ignored him ; there had been Pretender Naundorf, most persistent of all—France had pirouetted away. “Tell us how you escaped and what you have been doing since,” said a few French people to each of the Pretenders. And as none of them could answer that plausibly, and no two of the stories coincided, France had shut her ears.

“But how *did* your ancestor, M’sieur—I mean Sire—escape ?” Dick Stewart himself had inquired.

“We do not know,” was the reply. “Our sainted grandsire himself did not know, Prince.” And again at that word “Prince” Dick Stewart had blushed and winced, but to protest would have been idle. “Our martyred Grandsire remembered only this, that he had cast his—emaciated and juvenile form upon his—ah—pallet, to repose that night, and when he awoke he was—ah—exterior to his prison. It was a sensation of cold which had—ah—aroused him. He must have slept for hours, and when he awoke he—ah—considered himself to be dreaming. For he—ah—discovered himself to be lying bareheaded in the open fields, his place of—ah—incarceration being vanished. It was daylight, too.”

“Sounded like a tale from the Arabian Nights !” Dick Stewart reflected as, turning over in bed again, he considered

that part of the Grandemaison legend. "Or else he had been drugged, I suppose—they always drug people in romances. Spirited away, in spite of all the sansculottes, and then left alone, in the open country, to fend for himself! A boy diseased and half-imbecile with persecutions! Pretty thin. . . . But *she* believes it, and so, I suppose, ought I. Monseigneur Archange believes it, too. And as for Bonne, bless the woman! . . ."

Bonne's eyes and mouth had been widely opened, and her fingers had worked as though they clutched a broom, all the while M. de Grandemaison had declaimed.

"It was—ah—a trance, M. le Prince. We ourself are subject to the—ah—same phenomenon. Ourself, we have twice experienced such a cessation of the—ah—faculties. Our daughter, too,—and also our nephew, n'est-ce-pas, Archange?"

The Abbé had nodded assent, and would have spoken, breaking his taciturnity at last; but just then Bonne had thrust in her oar.

"Which I knows I always had to watch my little deary, when her *was* a little deary, that's all!"

M. de Grandemaison had waved the faithful retainer into silence, and the family story went on. The Head of the family veiled some of it, slurred over some of it, and never mentioned the Hatton Garden part of his history at all. But what the family history must have been Dick Stewart could well understand. The first Grandemaison was either a swindler or an enthusiast believing in himself and his right divine. His son, the second Grandemaison, with better reason to be an enthusiast perhaps, had found the contributions from the ultra-Royalist believers in his father's story became less willing, less regular, and less in every respect. The third Grandemaison—the first who had ever earned his living—had toiled in a trance of ambition all his days, as the most fervent believer of a family legend of them all; he meant to accumulate money, buy a Château Royal, dwell in a mimic Court there, and die as King *in* France.

"Pathos about it, though!" Dick Stewart muttered. To the first Charles Louis Grandemaison, true son of

Capet though he may have been, the Revolution had said, "You'll never be King!" To him, next, the Directoire had said "You shall not be King!" Then Napoleon had said "You shan't be King!" And lastly, the bitterest denial of all, at the Restoration the uncles of the true Dauphin—Louis XVIII. and Charles X.—clutching the Crown for themselves, had said "You may be our nephew and the true Louis, but you shan't be King even now!" Charles Louis de Grandemaison the first had lived all his days on Royalist alms, hoping ever: Charles Louis de Grandemaison the second in the middle of his days had given up the transmitted hope, and drowned himself in the Dutch canal. Charles Louis de Grandemaison the third—the one who now reigned in mimic and miniature style at Château d'On—had narrowed his hopes and aims into something practicable, and something not the less pathetic because absurd.

"He *looks* a Bourbon—he peacocks like a Bourbon—maybe he *is* a Bourbon," Dick Stewart reflected, as he now lay supine. "A good many Bourbon byblows about always, in the old days, and they would transmit the family features, no doubt. The old gentleman's not kingly, of course—not quite a gentleman, point of fact, but—if, as the proverb says, it takes three generations to breed a gentleman, the third Grandemaison generation has bred one, in Abbé Archange," Charles Louis de Grandemaison the fourth could hardly have failed to be a gentleman, but he had been drowned; the year after his cousin Archange, the only other male descendant, had taken the tonsure and irrevocable vows—irrevocable for a Bourbon, especially—the son and heir, Consolata's brother, had lost his life in the Thames. Now in Consolata remained the one hope of her father and his line. That she should be sweetly proud and noble was no wonder; proudly and justly her father might think of her as one of the lilies of France. Proudly he had planned for her. The Salic Law banned her, but "If we cannot make our daughter a Queen we will make her a Marquise" he had planned; so soon as the Comte succeeded to the higher title she should wed him. For *that* title was ancient and incontestable, and the Comte was descended from Henri Quatre; to the Comte and Consolata

might be born a son who should claim the Throne and reign.

"Poor old fellow!" Dick Stewart thought, as he now lay prone, his elbows on the pillow. "Cranky, no doubt, but—hard lines for him, if half what he believes is true. I can understand him now. I can see why he'll give his daughter to a potty little bounder—it's plain why he had the miniature and the portrait stolen—only way of getting them no doubt. Family relics he considers them, and a man who believes himself to be king can't be expected to observe the rules about property too nicely. I suppose in equity—not law-court equity, but what Shott calls equity. . . . By-the-by, I must see Shott and explain. If he won't accept the explanation I'll give him a cheque to get away. . . . I don't care a jot where the miniature comes from, she wears it royally and I'll see she keeps it, too. . . . Dare say the whole wonderful yarn's well-founded. If ever a girl looked a Princess. . . ."

Dick Stewart was persuading himself rapidly; and yet he knew that if the Grandemaison legend were true it would bar him the more from what his heart desired. "Must be just, though," he told himself, "If she's Royal she's Royal, no matter what the result to me. . . . I believe I'd rather see her in a Palace than the kind of home I could give her. . . . No, I wouldn't—I *wouldn't*—I love her, and I must get her if I can. I'll make up to the old gentleman more, I'll assume the Stuart, I'll shunt the bounder, I'll work Bonne; I must get Rory to speak for me to Archange."

He paused. Ay, there would be the rub. Archange the priest, who had taken orders because Rory's sister refused him, was hardly likely to let sentiment plead with him on behalf of Stewart. "Archange is the chief obstacle, no matter what he said at first," Dick Stewart's thoughts ran on—"Except herself, of course. How do I know she cares for me in the least? Never a look, not a sign! . . . Beastly presumptuous of me, to be reckoning up chances like that! Besides, I've promised Archange I wouldn't! Confound Archange!"

He tossed over in bed again, and then suddenly sprang

out. "Tobacco's what I want," he thought. "Bed's too hot for anything, I'll let it cool." And presently he stood at the window, looking out upon the little idle garden, tobacco-smoke curling out and upward from his lips.

All moon-silver, the garden; no, moon-snow. White and green the garden, as if pale green moon-snow had fallen. Silver-green the garden; dark at the rear of it the charmille. And something whitely moving, something pallid and spectral, something—he clutched at his pipe and dashed back his arm. He shivered; "Heavens above, what *is* it?" It was something hooded and ghostly, etched in gray against the dark background of the charmille.

XXXVIII

PALE, almost as pale as the Abbé himself, Dick Stewart looked next morning; the night had brought him little counsel and hardly any sleep. There was still the Grand-maison le end for him to ponder over, there was still the ache of his hopeless love, and there was also the strange nocturnal sight in the garden. Had the Abbé also seen that spectral figure, he wondered? The Abbé did not speak of it, and Stewart dared not; as they sat at their coffee under the portico they spoke of Consolata instead.

"You know our family history now, and you can comprehend," the Abbé said. "This inheritance of ours is a duty, but it is a burden, and almost a curse. How am I to carry it on, a priest? And if I unfrock myself, how could I hope to be accepted by Catholic France? It was madness of me to become a priest, but . . . perhaps you have guessed that I . . . loved the sister of Loxton-Phipps and . . . when her family knew what we claimed to be, they refused her to me. She herself . . . oh, there is something terribly matter-of-fact about your middle-class in England, Stewart; you are so afraid of anything out of the usual and the comfortable. . . . It drove me into the Church. Then my cousin the heir was drowned, when boating, and I became the heir. . . . If I had not taken the tonsure I could convey the family claim, but now—well, you will see that if it descends at all it must descend by Consolata. That is why she must marry Royalty, or a Frenchman. Her husband must be of unquestioned rank. There may be a son,"—Dick Stewart winced—"and her son will be heir to our rights." Dick Stewart scowled.

"I do not care for the Comte d'Ou," the Abbé went on. "He is paltry, and he is unhealthy. As a medical man I

can detect a—a certain unwholesome tendency. But he is French, and a noble. You see, we have no great choice."

"Stewart blood is pretty ancient, and I'm healthy enough. I dare say I'm better off, too, than the Comte."

"But you are not French. Consolata must marry a Frenchman if she cannot marry into a reigning House."

Dick Stewart jumped up. "Oh, for God's sake don't keep on telling me that!" he growled. "It's simply preposterous! I—I won't talk any more about it!" Then inconsistently and angrily he went on. "I'm rather a testy fellow, I know, but—you see, I descend from Mary Queen of Scots, who blew up her husband and lost her head." He tried to smile. "Marry her to *that* fellow!" He frowned. "Me judice, he's an awful bounder, though you say he isn't. But if you know he isn't healthy, the potty little fellow, and you let him marry your cousin, why . . . it's simply damnable, that's what it is, and I've no words strong enough to condemn it, man! . . . And I tell you what, I take back my promise,—I'll tell her I love her, I'll beg her to have me, if only to save herself from the bounder,—I'll—I'll carry her off in a motor-car, or something. . . . I'll do anything, to keep her out of that fellow's hands! . . . Oh, it isn't bearable, the mere thought of it! Confound you, don't you see it mustn't be done? I tell you it *shan't*!"

The Abbé himself had risen by now, proud and pale and angered, and what next might have passed between the two men may be imagined. It cannot be described, for a diversion happened. Tronk came through the garden to the portico: Tronk presented a salver, upon which lay a telegram. The telegram was addressed, "M. Stewart, par M. de Grandemaison, Château d'Ou, Provenchel, Haute Limousin."

"Permit me, Monseigneur," Dick Stewart said stiffly; then tore open the telegram, read it, re-read it, and then sat rigid awhile, perplexed and astounded.

Then he spoke. "If you will permit Tronk to take an order, Monseigneur? I must go to Paris at once. May I give an order?"

"Certainly you may. Tronk will do what you wish."

"Then, Tronk—if you will please hurry to my chauffeur

Dupont, and tell him to hurry here with the auto? I give him ten minutes, tell him. Tronk,"—he put a louis into the old man's hand—"if you will hurry as much as you can?" And Tronk began to do that.

Then Stewart turned to the Abbé. "I think you ought to see this, Monseigneur. So ought Sire. I leave it with you for him. How on earth they know I'm here at all I don't understand. They do know, though. This is a telegram from Bodinton, my school-chum Bodinton. He warns me to get away as soon as I can. It is in English, but you can read it. I think you ought. I think you must."

The Abbé took the slip of paper and read. "Get away from the Pretenders at once. They are known and will be expelled."

Fiercely the Abbé turned on Stewart. "You have told him, then?" But, "No," he added quickly, "you did not, you could not?"

"Of course I didn't! How could I? I didn't know your confounded secret till last night!"

"I beg your pardon," the Abbé said. Then he read on. "Descent imminent, get away, or go to prison yourself.—Frenchy."

"Frenchy?" the Abbé said inquiringly.

"That was his name at school. You see, I must go at once."

"You will?"

"I shall go to Bodinton straight."

The Abbé frowned. "You know we are in danger—you say you love my cousin, and yet—you run away?"

Then there was an explosion of wrath. "Confound you!" Dick Stewart cried. "Do you think I'm going for myself? Bodinton's my school-chum, I'm going to him to get him to leave you alone! Great heavens above, you thought I was anxious about my own skin, did you? What could they do to me if I stayed here, more than a week or two of arrest and annoyance? But Consolata! And her father! And Bonne, and yourself!"

"Stewart . . . I ask your pardon," the Abbé said de- ly. "You will do that for us? I was stupid, not to

understand. . . . Yet I don't suppose you can help us, my friend."

"I'll argue with Bodinton, I'll plead, I'll tell him you are all of you harmless, that you don't conspire, and the rest of it. I may, mayn't I?"

"Ye-es," said the Abbé, with some shame. "We . . . we are not dangerous to the Republic, I know."

"And if it's the picture they want, I'll tell Bodinton they shall have it back. I may, mayn't I?"

"The picture?" said the Abbé. "Have it back? But—I do not understand."

"Knew you didn't," Dick Stewart cried. "Nor Consolata, of course! But . . . portrait—your venerable ancestor's, you know—well, it was abstracted—pinched is the proper word, by-the-by—from Saumur."

"My uncle purchased it!" the Abbé said. He frowned. "Who says that it was stolen?"

"The police and the newspapers—the Curator of the Musée—you ask your uncle, *he* will know. . . . But here comes the machine, I can't stop to explain—I can be more use than that, I hope. . . . Here you are, Dupont—throw me the time-table, will you?" He turned the pages. "Paris—Limoges—one-fifty-four from Limoges." He looked at his watch. "Ten-twenty now—yes, I dare say we can do it. Dupont, you can run her to Limoges in three hours, I suppose? That's right. Pack her, man—the shirt-case and dressing-case . . . yes, that's right . . . Abbé," he went on as he mounted, "tell M. de Grandemaison—persuade him that I *had* to go. Don't let anybody" (he was thinking of Consolata) "suppose I'm running away. I'll be back to-morrow night, I hope—back early the day after to-morrow, anyhow. You'll explain to—to everybody, won't you?" And then he was gone.

Slowly along the path through the charmille and gently past the Château the automobile rolled; with a brief hollow rattle it passed beneath the arch; and then, out on the high-road—

"Let her rip, man!" Dick Stewart said. "That's it—let her out! . . . No, check her again—go slow—stop!"

He had perceived a pedestrian approaching, and an idea had been born; the pedestrian was Mr. Shott, and the idea was, "Don't want that fellow plaguing the old gentleman again, just now."

"Morning, Shott," Dick Stewart said, with just the shade of affable superiority which he knew would suit the occasion. "Quite the man I wanted to see—something to tell you—jump in, will you? We can talk as we go. Give you a ride, too. Won't you get in?"

Mr. Shott got in, and from that moment became Dick Stewart's prisoner. For "Let her out!" was now the command, and, with rush and roll that seemed to fling the highway behind it, the machine went forward so swiftly that before Mr. Shott could understand the situation the village of Ou and the inn where he had comfortably housed himself the past few days lay far, far behind.

"No good, Shott," his captor said, "you can't jump out, and I've got you. I'm not going to have you worrying M. de Grandemaison to-day, or to-morrow. You're coming for a long ride, Shott, that's what you're doing, and I'll lay you any odds you please you never took a bet on a horse that can cover the ground like this!"

"If I'd a-knowed," said Mr. Shott, breathing very hard and holding on very tightly, "if I'd a-knowed as you was going to gammon me like this, sir, I'd—I'd a seen you blowed and further, afore I'd a-got in, so there now!" This was at least the third time of saying that, during an hour of rapid motion. "Beats me, this does! 'Tisn't square, sir—'tisn't ekity of you. It's like the Lor, this is—once it picks you up it carries you orf, and no hescaping it, neither. Lemme out, sir—lemme down decent—you've no right to be eloping of me like this, and if I jumps out and commits suicide, why, it'll be your fault, anyhow! . . . Bless your heart, sir, I weren't going to do nothing to the old gent, 'cept to tell him as I'd took hours to think it over, and seeing as he's partly got the ekity on his side, why, if he'd split the difference, bedod? —"

"What difference?"

"Difference between what he offers and what I asks."

"How much?"

"Bless your heart, sir, he only offers fifty, and Body and me wants four-fifty, which is two hundred if you splits it, as I'm willing, though little enough for poor Sneakey and the Firm. But considering as the little pictur hadn't no diamants left on it, not real, and used to belong to the gent's family, and wan't the Museum's, not by ekity, why——"

"Mr. Shott," Dick Stewart said, curtly and decisively, "I'm going to Paris. I shall get some money there. You can have your two hundred. If you'll meet me on the Château terrace in . . . I don't know how many hours, but . . . meet me at ten o'clock day after to-morrow, say? And don't let the old gentleman see you, do you hear?"

"No, sir. Yes, sir. Ten o'clock. Hay em or pea em?"

"Eh?" said Dick Stewart. "Oh yes, I see what you mean. Hay em, Mr. Shott—the morning, I mean. I'll find the money. On condition, however—on condition you cease to bother M. de Grandemaison, and wipe the slate—you and your partner, and Sneakey too, confound you all! Is it a bargain?"

"It is," said Mr. Shott. "And chance it! Only—it'll be two-fifty, d'ye see?"

"Then give me your hand on it—you're honest, I be'ave. I'll trust you—I can, can't I?"

Mr. Shott shook hands. "Bless your heart, sir, if I wasn't honest I'd be in the Force now, making pickings and quodding wrong 'uns. No, not wrong 'uns, I mean, but—the wrong 'uns, you see, sir. When I gives my word——"

"Pull up!" Dick Stewart cried to Dupont. "You can get out now, Mr. Shott. You understand that you're not to show up at the château till ten o'clock the morning after next. I'm pretty sure you won't though, because just now we're—how many do you think, Dupont? Forty?"

"Fifty, M'sieur."

"Something like fifty kilomètres from the château. But you'll manage to find your way there in time, I suppose?"

"Lee-vee," said Mr. Shott. "Dec-vee and ordinary luck, I'll——"

But he paused, and stared. "Let her rip!" Dick Stewart had said, and the automobile was ripping in two the long ribbon of space that lay over the highway. When it had quite disappeared, Mr. Shott, turning round, clapped his right hand on his raised right thigh, said "Two hundred and fifty, bedod!" and wobbled into his long and soundless laugh. Then he commenced his long and weary way back to the village of Ou.

XXXIX

"HE hasn't come, deary, that's all!" Bonne said at midnight, the second day of Dick Stewart's absence from the Maison and Château. "It isn't no good the Conter coming and waiting to see him like this, as might as well have gone as usual, 'stead of sleeping here, too! Ah, that there nice young gentleman—as *is* one if ever there was one—he's finding it mortal hard, I expects, whatever he's gone for to do. But if there ever was a young gentleman anywhere as *can* do it, why it's Mr. Fancy Bendick, deary, that's all! And it's out of his true love for you!"

"Hush!" the girl said; she was standing at the window of her room and gazing out across the terrace, towards the charmille which hid the Maison. "Bonne, I have said to you before, at least six times, that you are not to speak to me about Mr. Stewart. You must not make me think of him so. I—I think of him too often, without that!"

"And you couldn't think of nobody nicer, so there now!" said Bonne doggedly. "Not for a man, I means, for you're nicer yourself, deary, though I'm not going and saying as men can't be nice; only, you're that ignorant, my beauty, and that innocent, and all that!"

"Bonne! Must I tell you again!" Consolata turned upon her petulantly. "Bonne, I *mustn't* think of him, you know I ought not! And I do, I do! I have been feeling so strange ever since he came, and it makes me *hate* the Comte. Bonne dear, . . . Bonne!"

Tears were in her eyes, and Bonne saw them; in a moment Bonne had caught her within a square but tender embrace. "My deary, my deary!" Bonne whispered, "p'raps if he keeps the police off us Seer'll let him have you! Ah, deary, wouldn't that be nice! You and him

for my missis and master, and p'raps a little teeny missis and master, and——”

“Hush, hush!” Consolata said proudly, and stepped towards a chair in front of a mirror. “Brush my hair and go!”

But when that long and richly-flowing hair had been brushed and coiled again, and the Dame du Palais was gone, her Princesse kept on thinking of Dick Stewart, his freshness of manner, his gaiety, his gallant impulsiveness, his long journeys and difficult mission, his devotion, and all that upon him might depend. She could not sleep, though for the last few nights she had slept badly, she knew. She rose, she crossed the carpet that was streaked with faint gleams of level light; out through the door-window she went, with eyes that dreamed as they rested on the moonlight-flooded lawn and the star-tipped trees of the charmille. She opened the door-window and listened; listened for what? For the rush and swish of swift tyres, for the panting gasps of a hot little spirit pent in a close prison of steel and compelled to toil at the wheel? Yes, indeed, she knew she was listening for Stewart's return. She listened, listened, but all she heard was the half-hour chimed from the stable-turret, and the dreaming moan of Tan as he slept on his mat outside her door; she stooped and petted him, stroking him back into sound sleep again. “Tan, too!” she thought: Tan had never liked the Comte, but from the first Mr. Stewart had been friends with Tan.

Night like a moonlit flood lay over the Limousin; was he hurrying through the treacherous light-and-darkness, over dangerous hills and through dales where shadows hid a peril in his path? He would hurry, she knew. “To me, for me!” she whispered, and then she blushed. No sleep for *him*, though her father in the room above the workshop would be asleep. The Comte in the chief guest-chamber, the upper room of the left-hand pavilion, the room above her own, would be asleep. Cousin Archange at the Maison might be wakeful still—some confused and improbable remembrance of having somewhere seen him sit writing late at night came to her vaguely. But Bonne in

her garret, and Tronk in his kitchen closet, all Provenchel and Listrac, and all the villagers at Ou, would be fast asleep. She only, she lonely, she the perplexed in mind and troubled at heart, could not sleep. No, not she only ; *he* would not be sleeping, he would be tearing through danger to her, for her, all for her.

She pushed the door-window wide open ; it was but a step down and across Tan to the level of the terrace, and she went out. As she did that a confused remembrance of having strangely done that at night before came over her, and she thrilled. It was not the stepping out which thrilled her, or the standing on the terrace and looking towards the Maison hidden in the charmille. No, it was something vaguer than that, but something shameful ; something half recollected—nay, not a quarter recollected, a mere shadow of a recollection, that refused to become precise, though she frowned with the effort to define it. “No, I can’t think what it was !” she thought, “but it was something shameful, I know.” Perhaps such a thrill as that had chilled and shaken the poor lad her ancestor, when he woke in the fields outside Paris, in the grey wetness of the dawn . . .

Then, suddenly, she seemed to know what it was that had brought the thrill and the sense of shame. She cast up her head in a proud and startled gesture. The Comte was occupying the room above her own—he might have been looking out of window—he might have seen her, he might have seen her bare feet, her loosely-coiled hair, and the clinging white garment, her only covering. Reddening she hurried into her room, and covered herself with a long burnous, a warm and enveloping robe of dove-coloured gray. She burned and thrilled with shame. *Had* he seen her ? She listened ; she went to the window and listened ; she ventured out upon the terrace again, to listen ; holding her small proud head sideways, one exquisite ear disengaged from the hood, she listened. No, the Comte could not have seen her ; he could not have been at his window. The Comte was asleep, for even through his shut window came a sound of stertorous breathing, that was almost a continuous snore.

She shuddered. “I can’t ! How *could* I ?” she thought.

"Even if Mr. Stewart had . . . never come! But perhaps. . . ." Hope suddenly lighted her and warmed her; perhaps the Comte would no longer ask for her hand? He had seemed so nervous and anxious; twice during dinner he had said, "I don't see how they can touch *me*, do you?" Twice at least he had said that: and it was not a very brave or courteous thing to say even once. Her father had thought the Comte could advise him, and help; her father had sent Tronk to him at the inn, the Hôtel Langouste at Provenchel. Her father need not have done that, she now reflected; the Comte had not seemed very wise in counsel, or able and ready to help. The Comte had thought chiefly of himself, of how he himself might be endangered. "Anyhow, I had better not come here again just now," he had said. "However, I will wait and see what your Englishman has to say." Hope lighted and warmed her again, as she reflected that the Comte would go in the morning, and never return to them, perhaps.

If the Comte had seemed at all jealous of—of Mr. Stewart—she would have thought it nicer of him, but he did not; unless to suggest that Mr. Stewart was himself a Government spy had indicated jealousy. She *hated* the Comte for saying a thing so unfair and false as that! Cousin Archange—oh, she *loved* Cousin Archange!—had said, "No, nothing of the kind, he is a very chivalrous, honest young Englishman, of the best sort of English middle-class!" She loved Cousin Archange for saying that. Her father had doubted him a little at first, when he had learned of the telegram and the sudden departure. And then her father—"poor old père!" she murmured—had been angry, angry with pride, angry that a stranger and an Englishman should think he had the power to protect him—*him*, the King of France!—in France. But Cousin Archange had been wiser than that; Cousin Archange had said, "But if he *can* help us, Sire? Did not a mere minstrel help a King of England out of prison?" And then her father had said, "Well, perhaps you are right, Archange. . . . We must allow that he is quite a capable and respectful young sir." Her father had seemed quite brave about the danger, the impending danger; so had Archange. It was only the

Comte who had seemed afraid. But then, he had altogether seemed so strange.

The shudder took her again ! The Comte had seemed so strange. And marriage meant such—such terrible things : Bonne had told her so ; Bonne had said that unless one loved the man who was one's husband marriage meant . . . oh, the most terrible and shameful things ; marriage, that is, when one did not love. At the convent school they had talked of marriage, but had never let her know what it meant. How stupid of them ! Yet if a girl loved a man like—like Mr. Stewart, Bonne had said—marriage might mean the happiest thing in the world. . . . Oh, if he would only come, if he would only come back and tell them what he had been able to do for them in Paris !

They had so waited for him, they had awaited the news he would bear so anxiously. If they were to be turned out of France her father would die. "Pauvre père, pauvre père !" she muttered ; the suspense had tried him. They had waited, for news, till midnight. Then Cousin Archange had said, "He will come to-night, Sire. The train from Paris will have reached Limoges more than four hours ago, and the automobile would not take so long as that to get here. Mr. Stewart will come to-morrow."

The next train possible was to reach Limoges at a quarter to seven in the morning, so Cousin Archange had decided that they had all better go to bed. The Comte could stay the night in the château ; it was then rather too late for him to be driven back to Provenchel. Besides, the Comte had seemed so anxious. Rather ill he had looked, but also afraid. Her father had not seemed afraid, she proudly remembered. Nor Cousin Archange either. But the Comte. . . . Of course the delay and suspense were trying to one's nerves. . . .

Again she shuddered, for she had heard the stertorous breathing again. No, she *could* not marry him ! she would tell her father so. Perhaps her father would agree ; her father and Cousin Archange must have noticed how strange and afraid the Comte had seemed. Probably the Comte himself would not now wish that she should marry him. He had quite trembled, at dinner ; he had looked ill, his

face had been almost the colour of lead. Yes, he had been afraid, and her father would not like that. Of course not; her father was royally brave. And even if Mr. Stewart had saved them from banishment, and the Comte had no cause for further fear, she could not marry a coward. Even if she did not love another, she could not marry the Comte now. *Did* she love another, she asked herself? She did not know. What was love? They had taught her nothing about love at the convent school. How stupid of them! *Did* she love Mr. Stewart?

Suddenly she blushed and burned, and she fled back into her room, as if to sanctuary. She shut the window close; she hasped the door; and then she tried to feel calm and heart-free again. For a while she kept the candle burning at the bedside, but presently she put the light out, and lay, white and enclosed in whiteness, hidden in the darkness even from herself. But even then she could not sleep. For the room was not utterly blank and dark. Moonlight filtered in and lit a portrait of Madame Julie, a picture that many a year had hung on the wall there, for this had been Madame Julie's room. Lioness-like the Duchess looked; and "This used to be her room," Consolata thought. Out through that window Madame Julie had stepped; out upon the terrace and across the lawn. And then through the old *charmille* to the old *Maison*, and . . . to Alain Leu. . . .

"*But he is not there now!*" The thought came like a flash that stung and burned; she burned with shame. "Oh, how could I think like that!" Blushing and burning she lay, rosy amidst the close whiteness. He? The he she meant was not Alain Leu. It was the sight of Madame Julie's portrait which had put that shameful thought into her mind! And she remembered her dream, when she sat on the *banc de Julie*, and two women who had lived and loved in the *château* seemed to come to her and urge her to love while she lived there too. . . .

She listened again. "I wish he was back. He isn't strong yet, quite, and . . . the roads are not too safe . . . and it is late and dark." She listened, listened, for the swish of rapid wheels and the panting of a fiery spirit at work in

its narrow laboratory; until, listening dozingly, she fell asleep. And presently, in her dream, the sound of wheels and the panting spirit seemed to become audible. "He is safe back," she murmured gladly, in her sleep. "I shall see him to-morrow."

At that same hour Dick Stewart was thinking of her. He lay back among cushions, as comfortable as might be, in a railway-carriage which went swinging along, part of a bumping and screeching train that with infinite fuss and only moderate speed was travelling along winding and sloping rails towards Limoges. He was thinking of her; he was proud of his efforts for her at Paris; it had been all for her that he had toiled, argued, persuaded, and worried; he was travelling to her now, and he wished he dare say to her, "What I have done was all for you."

Important people at Paris had agreed with B that it would be impolitic to banish M. de Grandemaison because of his peacocking and mimic Royalty alone. But they possessed another hold; the Saumur affair had given that to them. Theft was a serious and a criminal matter. The police had traced it all out, Bodinton said; they knew who stole the picture, whither he took the picture, and how much M. de Grandemaison had paid him for the picture and the theft. It was even as Shott knew, about the stolen miniature; though the French police had not appeared to be aware of that little affair as well.

"Deucedly clever at the Prefecture de Police," Dick Stewart said to himself, "I've been no end of an ass, not to detect the detective in Pied-de-nez. I let him fool me finely. I've no doubt at all now that it *was* Pied-de-nez who hurt my ankle. Bodinton as good as acknowledged that. Wanted to get me to the château to stir up things a little, Pied-de-nez did, and he succeeded too, heavens above! Lamed me, landed me at the Maison, made it impossible for them to turn me out—I owe him something for that, of course, but—I ought to have seen through him,—because it now occurs to me that he acted his part a little *too* well. Bodinton had the laugh of me there—watching the place for weeks he'd been, that fellow Leroux, so Bodinton

said. Larned me, got me there, and then reported that I was at the château. Bodinton grinned!

"Bodinton's been awfully helpful, though," Dick Stewart's thoughts ran on. Bodinton had grinned, but sympathized. Bodinton had taken him to the Minister of the Interior, and then to the Ministry of Police. He had argued, pleaded, negotiated. "English red tape isn't in it with French!" The arguing, pleading, and negotiating had occupied all day. "Fifteen functionaries I've had to see and argue with—fifteen at the very least!" His best argument had been that banishment would kill M. de Grandemaison. The functionaries, from the Ministers downwards, had not been so much anxious that he should live as sure that before long he would die. "Heart, he's got heart," Bodinton had said, "diabetes and heart—the medico he consulted in Paris tells us so. We would have let him quite alone if it hadn't been for this new Nationalist outbreak at Angoulême. Angoulême's too near Château d'Ou to be quite comfortable for us. Nobody knows what arrant asinineness these Nationalists won't venture on. Of course he's not really a Bourbon, but if the Nationalists thought that by taking up old Knibbs they could worry us, take him up they would. And I don't see what *you've* got to do with it, Dick Stewart?"

"Don't you? I've everything to do with it, Bodinton!"

"Ah!" Bodinton had said, the note of feeling in Dick Stewart's voice surprising him. "Old chap, is she so very beautiful?"

And then Bodinton had suggested something tempting. "Suppose we say the old bird must give an undertaking that his daughter shan't marry a Frenchman? We don't want a new line of Pretenders, you know," Bodinton had said. For the moment Dick Stewart had jumped at that, but the next minute he jumped on it. "No, that wouldn't be fair,—drop that, Frenchy! You mean to help me, I know, but—oh hang it, no, it wouldn't be square?" And Bodinton had not persisted. "Good thing for the old gentleman that Frenchy and I went to school together, ten years ago," Dick Stewart now thought, as he recalled his efforts and Bodinton's aid to them.

Rather heroic of himself, he now thought— "Too heroic, point of fact!"—not to have jumped at that stipulation and accepted it. "Would have kept her from marrying the bounder, anyhow! But it wouldn't have been the square thing,—not ekity, as Shott would say. Wonder where he is now, by-the-by, that Shott fellow? Walked back every inch of the way by now, the dogged Englishy son of a gun, I'll warrant! And he'll turn up for his two hundred and fifty at ten o'clock to-morrow—no, I mean to-day, by Jove!—punctual and egg-supported! If I hadn't had so much trouble to get him the money in English notes, I'd have been there hours ago, confound him!"

Then Stewart's thoughts shot ahead of the night-train, ahead to Limoges, to the High Limousin, to the road along which the waiting automobile was to carry him, on through the dark and the tedium to the château and that sweet and mysterious sanctuary wherein Consolata would be lying asleep. "If I've lost I've lost," he whispered. "If I've lost you I've lost you, but . . . I've tried to help you, and—anyhow, I love you, and it's all for you!" The iron clank of the train seemed to echo that. "He loves her, he loves her!" said crank and axle, pivot and tyre. They never said, "She loves him, she loves him!" but "He loves you, he loves you!" they sometimes seemed to say. It must have been the wireless telegraphy of love which carried that refrain to ready ears, small and shell-like ears, in the bedchamber on the terrace-level at the château. And that may have been why in the dawn the slumberer there arose, passed out to the terrace, and crossed the lawn towards the charmille.

XL

SEVERIN D'OU, abed in the upper room meanwhile, had been sleeping more soundly than anybody. From midnight till four o'clock in the morning he had puffed out that stertorous breath of his, cutting it every now and then with a clicking champ of his teeth. That was always his way of sleeping after an attack of his illness, his strange convulsive illness; that was also his way of sleeping when an impending attack had passed off before realization, a threat and a risk alone. Very narrowly he had escaped an attack when he reached the château and was told of the danger which the Englishman had gone to Paris to ward off, if that were possible; but though he had felt the aura, the warning aura, the attack had not materialized, it had passed away. Perhaps his very anger had helped to avert it, for a sudden and jealous anger he had felt. Anger with this officious meddling Englishman, who had unsettled him so on the terrace of the Hôtel Langouste the morning at Provenchel, he had felt; anger that he, Severin, Comte d'Ou, should be mixed up with and affected by the doings of this English fellow. For M. le Comte disliked all Englishmen on principle, and he had reason to dislike Dick Stewart in particular, though he had only spoken with him once.

So that M. le Comte, arriving at the château and hearing a tale of espionage and impending banishment, was quick to suggest that probably the meddling Englishman was nothing better than a spy himself. Mademoiselle de Grandemaison looked very proudly contemptuous when she heard him say that, but Mademoiselle's anger at him caused the Comte very little disquietude; for now that the Grandemaison connection was turning out to be openly dangerous, the Comte was feeling less than lukewarm about the projected

marriage. The property in Château d'On might be purchased back at too high a price for him, he reflected ; his connection with the present owners of the château must not be allowed to endanger himself. M. de Grandemaison's summons had come to him on the second day of Stewart's absence in terms that seemed peremptory, as if from a real King to his humble liege ; he had answered the summons at once, because he was anxious to know what the danger vaguely mentioned in it could be ; but he had disliked the summons and its tone ; moreover, during dinner there had been too much of a tendency in the conversation to assume that the Grandemaïsons and he were quite in the same boat. It was these experiences and considerations which had caused him to bear with equanimity the hauteur of Mademoiselle when he uttered his peevish suggestion that probably the Englishman was himself a spy. Of course, if the Englishman were not, and succeeded in his mission at Paris, and it were still safe to marry Mademoiselle, why, then——

That was what M. le Comte had thought, over and over again, during the hours between dinner and bedtime, while the Grandemaïsons would insist on sitting up, to await an arrival which was little probable that night. But when at last the Comte escaped to his bedchamber he did not renew those wise and cautious speculations of his, for he fell asleep immediately ; once in bed, there were no dreams, no worries, no thoughts of love or telepathic messages for him ; sleep, heavy and thick and stertorous sleep was his portion, and dawn was yielding to daylight when he first awoke. He woke with a tremor, for he had seemed to feel the aura ; it was as though the aura had just breathed upon him lightly, with a furtive and ghostly touch, in the night.

The habit of a Frenchman about bedroom windows is to keep them shut or almost shut all night, and open almost all day. That is why the Comte d'On got out of bed directly he woke, and went to the window to open it, doing this mechanically and almost without intention. And that was how it came to pass that, casually glancing out at the garden, he perceived the figure of Mademoiselle de Grandemaison, cloaked and hooded in something grey, go crossing the lawn and passing into the charmille.

The habit of many Frenchmen about women is to suspect them, any of them—all of them, indeed—of a lack of severity and restraint in those secret relations of life which are concerned with sex. Hardly does the *jeune fille du monde* herself escape his suspicion; sooner or later, many Frenchmen believe, every petticoat alive will kiss with the right man, if he will pledge himself to kiss and not tell. This ingrained habit of the Gallic mind was strong in Severin d'Ou, strong enough even to withstand the first shock of incredibility and disbelief of his sight which assailed him; he looked again, to be sure about it, it is true; and, looking a third time, he became certain that Mademoiselle de Grandemaison it was—Mademoiselle de Grandemaison, even!—going softly, in the solitude of early morning, cloaked and hooded and stealthy, into the charmillé and towards the Maison where in isolation every night dwelt a man.

To do him justice, it must be said that at first M. le Comte had need to struggle with a foolish impulse to rub his eyes, make oath that the thing was impossible, and acquit this particular Mademoiselle of what he would have believed at once concerning any other. But quickly that generous weakness of his mind passed away. Once certain that it was she, he immediately put the habitual construction upon what she was doing. It did not occur to the Comte that Mademoiselle might be *la sonnambula*; he did not recall that part of the Grandemaison legend which described the unconscious evasion of the boy from the Temple prison, though “It was a trance, M. de Comte—we ourselves are subject to the same—ah—family phenomenon,” M. de Grandemaison had told him, six or seven times at least; no, M. le Comte did not for a moment think of that. For his habit had been to think the worst of women, at any opportunity to think doubtingly of any of them, and at the first blush to conclude that there must be the worst need for blushes. And habit, that master of the mind which Dick Stewart had so contemned, was too strong for any feebly generous motion of the heart of M. le Comte d'Ou.

For certainly Mademoiselle had gone to the Maison;

cloaked and face-hidden, surreptitious and in the secrecy of the hours that sleep, she had gone to the secluded little house inhabited only by men. It must have been the opening of her door-window which had roused him, the Comte thought. Whatever it was, it had enabled him to see her and detect her; in the very act he had caught her, slipping across the lawn, disappearing into the thicket, going to the Maison and the arms of the Englishman! "A thousand curses!" cried Severin d'Ou. The ignominy of it for her! And the insult of it for *him*, for M. le Comte d'Ou! . . .

And yet—it could not be the Englishman to whom she had gone? The Englishman was travelling from Paris, probably; at the nearest he would be getting towards Limoges about that hour. Besides, if he had—it was impossible, but if he had—returned to the Maison in the night, would the proud Mademoiselle, the hypocritical touch-me-not, go to him at the Maison while the Abbé was there?

Then came the most evil thought. "*The Abbé?*" The Comte uttered an evil little laugh. For the Abbé was her cousin, and her cousin was a priest, and yet it would be to the priest her cousin that Mademoiselle had gone. She would have waited till quite sure that the Englishman had not returned, and could not return for hours, and then. . . . Was she with him the last night too, the Comte wondered; for the Englishman had been away from the Maison for nearly two days and two nights now, it appeared.

"*The Abbé!* Horrible! *Les damnés!*" the watcher cried as he stood trembling at the window. By stealth and in disguise, to the Maison and a priest her cousin, in that haunt of old passion and abandonment, she had gone. "And I should have married her, never knowing! Ah, *les scélérats!*"

But no, it could not be that, he told himself presently, the memory of frank looks from pure eyes, of a proudly maiden mien and all sweet signs of innocence rebuked him. She must have been sleepless—she would be taking the air awhile, in the hope that it would give her sleep—she was anxious, of course, for her father and for herself—no, he had wronged her, perhaps. She would be coming back

soon, he would put away evil thoughts of her. . . . And yet——

He looked at his watch ; nearly five o'clock ; she must have been gone twenty minutes by now. Well, he would allow her ten minutes more ; half an hour was quite long enough for an airing, for an innocent visit to the *charmille*. If he saw her returning within the next ten minutes he would suppose her guiltless. But if she remained much longer behind the green screen of the trees, in the neighbourhood of the silent and secluded *Maison*, why—he would hold her guilty, for she would be visiting the *Maison* itself.

And thus, because of his habit of mind in such matters, and the French custom of cloistering and otherwise guarding demoiselles, thought Severin, Comte d'Ou, of *Consolata de Grandemaison* ; in a way that no Englishman in the circumstances would have thought of any English girl.

Consolata awoke. She awoke to find herself within the little idle garden, just within it, close to the gate, her face turned to the gate, and her hand upon the dew-cold iron latch. She awoke to astonishment, discomfort, and then terror : she also awoke with remembrance. Had she really left her room and come to the *Maison*, like this ? Yes, she had, she told herself with shame ; yes, and she had done it before, twice or thrice before, she remembered ; she could remember it now. The other morning, arising from morning sleep, she had noted the soil of wet sand on her feet ; she could not account for that, then. But this time—she looked down ; she was shod with her bedroom slippers ; her feet were not soiled now.

Yet she felt herself soiled throughout. What, she had come like this, to the place where *Stewart* slept ! What, she had wandered round the *Maison*, she had crossed the piazza of it—she remembered doing that now, she remembered doing it before, she remembered having seen *Cousin Archange* sit at his table writing. . . . She had come to the *Maison*, as *Madame Julie* used to do ; she had incarnated *Madame Julie* again ; sleeping in the same room, going forth at night by the same path, coming to

the same Maison, the same dwelling of one beloved. Ah, the shame of it, the wickedness and the shame !

Upon her knees she fell, outside the little idle garden, in the sweet calm and rested freshness of that matutinal hour, and she said her litany to Mary pure and motherly, as if in church ; the light of morning on her cheek the while, the red and blushing light of morning, the morning of her life and of the day. She prayed, she was comforted, and yet she was still borne down by a sense of shame and wonderment. What had brought her here ? Was it for her "the dwelling of one beloved" ? Did she love him like this, that even from sleep she must rise, unconscious, and in sleep approach the place where he slept ? Oh the shame, the shameful shame !

She sprang up, she hurried through the charmille ; blushing and fleet she sped across the lawn, with but one glance at the windows of the château, windows that hung tall and blank and apparently sightless over her as she gained the terrace and fled into her room ; windows apparently sightless, only, for at the window above hers the Comte had watched. The ten minutes of grace had expired, and ten others, before she returned ; frigidly thinking what he had to do and how best to do it, M. le Comte had watched for her till she came. And now, looking back at the charmille from which she had come, he saw the Abbé standing there, at the edge of the charmille, and was certain then that in the Maison and with the Abbé she had been. It did not occur to the Comte that the Abbé might have awaked, have heard something in the garden, have looked out and seen, recognized his cousin in the apparition, and perceived that she slept and walked in her sleep, as other Grandemaïsons had done ; it did not occur to the Comte that the Abbé would avoid waking her, and when he saw her awaking would avoid being seen by her, but would follow and watch her till she had safely got to her room again. No, "Les scélérats !" the Comte growled as, shivering, he coiled and curled himself up in his bed, and trembled at the renewed breath of the aura on his brow.

XLI

"It's getting on for ten, deary," Bonne said, as she roused Consolata. "No, he isn't come yet, deary—no, deary—but there's a man been asking for him what looks like Peter Neigh, only dressed up, as says he's had a telegram about him, and Seer's asking for you, as is that excited he don't know what he's doing with hisself, and you sleeping like this, my beauty, it isn't natural, law! So there, deary, eat a bit o' something, do!"

Outside on the terrace, well round the corner from the widow-sills of Consolata's room, M. de Grandemaison's chair stood vacant, and the pile of small white grapes on the table under the awning had hardly been touched. M. de Grandemaison had gone into the workshop for the moment. In and out of his workshop he had been flitting—if so portly and magnificent a person could be said to flit—in and out of his workshop had he been, taking up the file and the key, laying them down, going out to listen for Stewart's automobile, plucking a grape or two, and then trotting back to the room of the bench and the vice. M. de Grandemaison was feeling very anxious and troubled, more troubled and anxious than ever he had felt before, since he had come to dwell in France. The waiting and the suspense were troubling him. No telegram had come to him from Stewart, and that in itself was an evil augury, M. de Grandemaison supposed.

What news would the young sir bring? That, of course, was the question troubling M. de Grandemaison. No doubt it had annoyed his pride at first, that he, Charles-Louis de Bourbon, King of France and Navarre, should be beholden to any young sir, particularly to a young sir from England, for aid and protection in a

State matter ; but that might pass ; indeed, it had already passed. For "It is but a return of assistance," M. de Grandemaison had reflected. "Our ancestor Louis the Fourteenth was very—ah—protective to the Stuarts, and this is but a return of service." And the young sir had behaved so suitably, so deferentially, so reverentially indeed, in the matter ; he had asked M. de Grandemaison's permission to go to Paris at all ; no doubt he was quite a worthy and well-bred young sir, though Archange thought him a little impetuous and slangy. Slangy, no doubt, but—at this point in M. de Grandemaison's reflections his eyes became moistened, for he recalled the slang which his own son, his dead son, had picked up at Merchant Taylors' School.

Ah yes, indeed, the proud annoyance that M. de Grandemaison should be depending on a young Englishman for influence with a school-fellow, a Monsieur—Dobinton or—ah—Dogington—might pass, for poor dead Charles-Louis had made friends at school like that. But what could not pass from the mind of M. de Grandemaison was the danger which the young sir had gone to Paris to avert, if he could ; and it was so unlikely that he could. The danger was so great, it had loomed up so suddenly, and it was in itself so unjust. "We have not been actively a Monarch," M. de Grandemaison told himself ; "We have—ah—acquiesced in the rule of the Republic so far. We have not raised our flag or—ah—summoned our levies. All that we have done has been to live in a château, like a Monarch in—ah—reduced circumstances. Why, therefore, should they wish to banish us from our beloved realm ? They *shall* not !" he proclaimed aloud, to the locks and keys around him. "We will—ah—expire, rather !" And then he sank down in a chair, feeling weak and weary.

Suspense and delay were damping out the last sparks of hope within him. Could a young English sir, of no particular public standing even in his own country, use influence enough in a matter of State at Paris ? I would the Monsieur—ah—"Monsieur—ah—diable m'emporte si je me rappelle son nom ! Ah oui—Monsieur Boginton !"

—*would* he be able to avert the peril from the château, even if he tried? How very probably not. A Monsieur Boginton, who and what could a mere Monsieur Boginton be? A mere Monsieur Boginton would have had no prestige nor influence whatever at a Royal Court, of course, but—"In these days of—ah—democratic corruption, what is not decided by bribes is—ah—affected by the personal relations of quite—ah—vulgar persons." Monsieur Boginton had been to Winchester School, however. . . . "Yes, it is possible, it is—ah—plausible, that the young sir and his Monsieur Boginton may succeed."

But if they did not? Ah, then would come an hour of heartbreak, for how could M. de Grandemaison bear to quit France and his château? He had toiled and hoarded so long for that, he had schemed and scraped for nearly forty years that he might enjoy at least a simulacrum of Royalty. All his life he had worked and hoped, his best expectation towards the end being to live a few years and then die as King *in* France, though not King of France; for ever since his son had been drowned, and Nephew Archange had taken the tonsure, and thus the male line must die out, M. de Grandemaison had felt no more effectual ambition than that. He would play at being King, just as the Duc d'Orléans did in England; only he, M. de Grandemaison, would do it in France. And if now, after only a few weeks of that, he was to be proscribed, deprived of even the enjoyment of his pathetically humbled ambition, and banished from the sweet air and lovely sight of France, the defeat of it and the cruelty of it would break his heart, he told himself, his eyes becoming more than moist. "Martyrs always," he muttered, "it is a hard world for our House." And all around him the locks and keys, symbols of man's grasping harshness, bore witness that the world is hard indeed.

How hard and evil the world can be, M. de Grandemaison was shortly to know from another quarter. Not from the news which Dick Stewart, at that moment tuff-tuffing towards Listrac, was bringing, however, for that news was favourable and would have rejoiced the old Pretender's

heart. A bargain had been struck at the Ministry of Police, to the effect that there should be no immediate expulsion of the Grandemaçons. There was to be no expulsion of the Grandemaçons at all if the old Pretender and the Abbé, his nephew, would consent to certain undertakings. If M. de Grandemaçon would return the picture to Saumur, through the hands of Stewart and Bodington; if he would give a pledge never to peacock as King *outside* the château and the demesne, or use the titles of Sire, Monseigneur, and Madame Royal in public; if, further, the Abbé would report himself monthly to the Bishop of Limoges, and the Bishop were able to report to the Minister for Public Worship that the Abbé was not conspiring; then no action by the police or the Government would be taken against the inhabitants of the château. Surveillance of the château and its inhabitants would continue, it is true, but as unobtrusively as M. Joseph Leroux's own watch upon it had been conducted, and peace for the place would entirely depend on the peace of the people in it. But at the first symptom of anything like conspiracy or Royalist agitation the Grandemaçons would be arrested and deported. Already an intimation that Stewart was the bearer of terms of truce had been sent to M. Joseph Leroux, by telegram addressed to "J. L." at the village post office, whither Coco went the first thing each morning for the letters and telegrams which Leroux could not claim himself while disguised as Pied-de-nez. And this morning the great Joseph Leroux, clad *en civile* and in his right personality, had come to the château, puzzled Bonne by his somehow familiar face, demanded to see Monsieur Stoo-ar, and learned that he had not arrived. That was less than half an hour ago, it is true, and the appearance of this stranger had a little perturbed M. de Grandemaçon; but it was not that which showed him again that the world is evil and hard.

No, the new proof of how hard and evil the world can be was to come from M. le Comte d'Ou. At that moment M. le Comte was preparing to bear to M. de Grandemaçon the worst and most insulting of tidings. M. le Comte had lain late in bed, dosing himself with pilules, and warding off an impending access of his strange illness; for four

hours he had lain still and silent, warding his enemy off so well that when at ten o'clock Tronk entered the room with a dish of biscuits and chocolate, Tronk could be answered by the Comte without betrayal.

And now M. le Comte was descending, quite determined, by four hours of thinking it over, to inform M. de Grandemaison that the project of marriage between Severin, Comte d'Ou, and Consolata, Mademoiselle de Grandemaison, must be abandoned. Having done that, he would quit the château, with all the honest severity in such matters that men can so fitly show, in proud disgust and reprehension. For though many a Comte and Marquis d'Ou had been openly dissolute, and many a Comtesse and Marquise d'Ou had been discreetly peccable *after* marriage, no son of that noble House had ever wedded a demoiselle who could visit a bachelor's quarters by stealth—at least, so far as Severin d'Ou was aware. "I will tell her father that in no circumstances can I marry her," he had resolved, therefore. "But—I will not tell him why."

Yet when he neared the workshop door, and it opened before him, and he saw M. de Grandemaison emerging, about to flit back to the terrace again; and when he noted the anxiety and excitement in the worn old face while M. de Grandemaison so politely re-entered the workshop with him, M. le Comte d'Ou began to feel anxious and dangerously excited himself. It was not going to be easy to say to this fond and proud old father, "I will not marry your daughter, nor will I tell you why." Fathers have such a prejudice against anything which seems to imply a slur upon their daughters. At need a man can bear a good deal of indignity himself; some men can allow their wives to bear a good deal more; but when it comes to accusations explicit or implied against a daughter's honour few men can bear it calmly. M. le Comte suddenly became aware of that in connection with M. de Grandemaison, and just as suddenly—more suddenly, indeed—he became aware of the aura. It was not a waft of air through the doorway or the windows which had fanned him abruptly; no, it was the aura. Just the merest breath, no doubt, and a faint symptom only, but undoubtedly the breath of the aura.

And M. le Comte well knew that the fainter the aura at first the more prolonged and terrible the attack which would follow. Moreover, the attack had twice been warded off of late ; once by his hiding behind the hall-door of the château, and once again by lying in bed for four hours and swallowing pilules ; and M. le Comte well knew that when at the third endeavour the attack should seize him it was likely to be a very bad attack indeed.

He must get the unpleasant business over, and retire to hide himself as soon as he could, he reflected : so, hardly returning M. de Grandemaison's polite and magnificent morning salutations, he said, " I must speak with you, sir, at once—I am going away." And then, within the workshop, with its door closed and its windows hardly open to the terrace, M. le Comte must pluck up all the courage he could and say, " Monsieur, I wish to inform you that I cannot marry your daughter."

" What, what ? . . . *Why* not ? " It was the inevitable, haughty and astounded demand, and with it came the aura again, so that the Comte could not but shake, and tremble, and stammer. " I—I don't wish to say ! " he stammered.

" You—ah—do not wish to *say* ? " M. de Grandemaison seemed to tower and swell ; never before had M. de Grandemaison looked so haughty, so royally angry, so much of a magnificent Bourbon. " You—do—not—wish—to say ? Is it because you are—ah—apprehensive of M. Boginton ? A coward, are you ? A—a rat ? "

That roused M. le Comte's pride. " It—it isn't what you think, it isn't politics."

M. de Grandemaison frowned. " Maugrebleu, you tell us that you will not—ah—espouse Madame Royale ! And you—ah—tergiversate, you conceal your reason ! Pardieu, Monsieur, do you suppose—— " M. de Grandemaison drew a long breath—" do you—ah—consider that we can permit—— "

M. de Grandemaison paused, for M. le Comte was looking very ghastly. M. le Comte had cast out his hands appealingly. " I am ill," M. le Comte said, speaking thickly. " I am not strong enough, now . . . I must go."

He turned, and he seemed to grope for the door, though daylight came strongly in through the terrace windows. "I assure you, I am very unwell . . . I must defer. . . ."

M. de Grandemaison clapped a heavy and angry hand on the Comte's shoulder. "Why do you—ah—grin so insultingly, varlet? What do you mean?"

M. le Comte was not intentionally grinning; he was grimacing, but he could not help that; it was as though he wished to smile, but grinned instead. Yet he wished neither to grin nor smile; ah, this was going to be one of his worst attacks, he knew—a very terrible and dangerous attack indeed. For a rapid and continuous shiver had begun, and he felt a freezing sweat upon his skin, all over. Grey with pallor, and shivering with cold, he stumbled towards the door. "You had better . . . let me get away, I . . . shall be very ill."

But M. de Grandemaison now stood between him and the door. "Not till you have told us why?"

Then M. le Comte in desperation spoke; he would have done anything at that moment to get free, to escape into hiding. "Because she—goes—to the Maison at night—I saw her—with—the Abbé!"

With nothing less than a roar, a roar of hurt pride and affection, the cry of that abrupt and terrible fury of his, M. de Grandemaison seized him. And then came the sudden and awful convulsion, then came the shrill involuntary scream. It was no scream for help; the Comte was past all calling for help; it was the symptomatic shriek of his access, the attack in its fellest form and strictest rigour was upon him. His eyes were now white globes, almost wholly visible, and purple lines were marking his chalky face like brandings. He had reeled against M. de Grandemaison unconsciously; he did not even know that M. de Grandemaison had taken him by the throat and was gripping, gripping. Furious with that abrupt and uncontrollable rage of his, that sudden and breathless anger which at times swept down upon him, M. de Grandemaison was gripping and dragging. "Our daughter! *Our* daughter?"

. . . Liar! Devil!

But M. le Comte did not hear; M. le Comte did not

know that he had rolled upon the floor, with the clutch still tight at his throat and the infuriate father still cursing him. M. le Comte knew nothing of that; he was never to know anything in this life again. M. le Comte knew the great secret instead. There had come a pang like an explosion within his heart, and "death stayed with him there, and he with death."

XLII

AT that dread moment came the swish and roll of wheels through the archway, and in gladness and pride and hope Dick Stewart leapt from the car and ran with his good news up the terrace steps. "*Bonne! Bonne! M. de Grandemaison!*"

"He's in there, sir!" said the voice of some one hiding in the *lanrustinus* bushes near the workshop window. "Better go in quick, bedod! They're fighting, he's got him down! If you hadn't said I wasn't to let the old gent see me, I——"

Stewart perceived a pointing hand, peered in, saw mischief, dashed a casement open, and rushed within. The next minute he appeared at the window again, and shouted to the chauffeur. "Fetch a doctor, Dupont!—no, fetch the Abbé first! Go like the devil, Dupont—the Abbé, and then a doctor!"

Dropping to his side beside the thing which had been the Comte, he tore the collar away, lifted the heavy head, and looked round for help; and as he looked round he saw that M. de Grandemaison had sunk into a chair, as if with feebleness, and was staring at the floor.

"Water, sir—bring some water! How did it happen? You were struggling with him, weren't you? You must have . . . I believe you have done for him; I do!"

"We hope we have." Slowly the words came, but savagely. "He accused our daughter . . . *our* daughter—Madame Royale! . . . The liar, the liar!—let him die!" But he had left his chair and was bringing water, which sparkled as Stewart held it to the foam-disfigured lips. The clenched teeth refused it entrance, it dropped and trickled down. "No matter," M. de Grandemaison

muttered morosely. "Let the—ah—liar die! He accused our daughter!"

"Of what?" Stewart cried, peevish with the strain of the moment. "You said that before! What did he accuse her of?"

But M. de Grandemaison went on talking to himself. "Our daughter unchaste! *Our* daughter!"

"Great heavens above, what on earth are you saying!" cried Stewart, jumping up and letting the heavy head bump down.

"It is his excuse," M. de Grandemaison muttered. "Not to marry her. . . . He is afraid, he is a coward!"

"Not to marry her?" Dick Stewart cried. "Because she. . . . Was *that* what he said? No wonder you did for him, sir, I'd have done it myself! . . . Sir, will you let *me* marry her? I love her, I came to France to find her! . . . Sir, if she will have me, will you give her to me?"

But M. de Grandemaison's vacant look showed that he did not hear, or at any rate did not heed. And just then came the roll and swish of wheels anew; the car paused a moment outside, and then went rumbling under the archway. Into the workshop hurried the Abbé, paler than ever after his first glance at the dead man on the floor.

The Abbé turned his eyes on Stewart questioningly, and Stewart's eyes looked hopelessness at him. Suddenly and terribly this thing had happened, with the awful abruptness which characterizes that double catastrophe, an unexpected and violent death. Terribly and suddenly this thing had befallen, crashing down on Stewart's gladness in arrival, and crushing the result of all his energetic work. For how could the bargain as to quietude and lack of notoriety by the people of the château be kept now? It would be bad enough, it would be shameful enough, it would be daunting and depressing enough that the man one wanted to make one's father-in-law should have done murder, but who on earth could lightly bear to have as father-in-law one who, as Mr. Shott would put it, was "doing time"? Stewart knew that M. de Grandemaison stood in no danger of the guillotine, for the guillotine has

ceased to fall in France, these days. But M. de Grandemaison would have to go to prison if the truth came out ; perhaps he would be sent to the penal island of New Caledonia. *Her father, Consolata's father ! And how she would grieve ! . . .*

The Abbé rose from beside the corpse. "He has lived," the Abbé said. "He is quite dead now. He must have died immediately, almost in a second. . . . I am little surprised, Stewart. Status epilepticus—I expected that he suffered from that. Now I see that it was cardiac, too." He knelt again, and wiped the foam from the blue lips and livid chin ; then he covered the face, and rose. "Uncle, you would see it, I suppose ? It happened with a convulsion, did it not ? And a shriek ?" In vain Dick Stewart had made a warning gesture.

M. de Grandemaison was still sunk in his chair, and still staring at the floor. But he heard his nephew's question.

"It does not matter," he muttered. "He—ah—deserved our justice. He accused our daughter of—ah—terrible things, Archange."

The Abbé frowned at the corpse. "What did he say ?" "He said that she went . . . at night . . . to you."

With such an accent of pain was it said, that Dick Stewart broke in impetuously—

"Sir, don't talk about it—don't think about it—he'll tell no more lies. . . . Archange, I always *said* he was a bounder. . . . Sir," he turned to M. de Grandemaison, "if you will let her marry *me* ?"

"Consolata walks in her sleep, Uncle," the Abbé said : "I saw her in the garden this morning."

And then Dick Stewart knew the whole story, remembering the nocturnal visit which he himself had witnessed. Silence befel, and during that minute of silence the window opened, and into the room stepped Joseph Leroux.

Obedying his master's order, and rushing down to the village after he had brought the priest to the terrace Dupont, the chauffeur, had shouted right and left to wayfarers, "A doctor ? Where can I find a doctor ?" And

Joseph Leroux, hearing that, had directed him, and then had hurried to the château himself. So now, when pantingly he came into the room, and stooped to the corpse, and Dick Stewart saw and knew him for the detective who had fooled him by masquerading as Pied-de-nez, the last of the hope and gladness which Stewart had brought from Paris went out like the last feeble gleam of a candle, leaving everything dark and blank.

M. de Grandemaison did not seem to notice the stranger enter; M. de Grandemaison was muttering again.

"It was our—ah—justice," he was muttering. "We had the right to punish him."

And then Dick Stewart stamped his foot and cursed, for now M. Joseph Leroux could not but intervene.

"Silence, Uncle—you are talking nonsense!" the Abbé was sternly saying, but he did not persuade M. Joseph Leroux that nonsense it was.

He had turned round, and was regarding M. de Grandemaison eagerly; not at all to the taste of M. Joseph Leroux had been the hushing-up telegram from the Ministry of the Interior that morning. M. Joseph Leroux had been anxious to obtain for himself the fame of detecting a plot and arresting the chief plotter against the Republic; M. Joseph Leroux had arranged the entrance of Dick Stewart to the château with that aim. It now appeared that this Englishman had befooled him—*him*, M. Joseph Leroux; he had been so influential at the Ministry of the Interior that M. Joseph Leroux had been warned by telegram not to press matters, to be quiescent, and to be remotely watchful, only. But now. . . .

Hope beamed on M. Joseph Leroux again. "What did you say, sir?" he asked, stepping forward. "You had the right to punish the Comte, did you say? Seems to me somebody's throttled him. Who was it, sir? Look at me, sir, if you please. Look at me, I pretended to be Pied-de-nez, but I'm a high police-agent, and—look at me!"

M. de Grandemaison obeyed. Looking up, M. de Grandemaison saw the transformed Pied-de-nez stand before him, and put out a shaking hand, as if to wave that impertinent presence away. Then he began his muttering

again. He was justifying himself to himself, he was explaining away what he had done, he was relieving his conscience by an argument which only a father who is also a king could use.

"He—ah—defamed our daughter. We had the right to punish him. He was our—ah—subject. It was our right."

Then suddenly the bark of Tan was heard outside the door.

"Seer, Seer! What is it? My deary wants to come in, but I'm not letting her! What is it, Seer? . . . It's something she oughtn't to see, that's all! . . . No, deary, you mustn't—you *shan't*, deary! Seer, I'm holding her! Lock the door!" And then came again the loud pert bark of the dog.

Dick Stewart had sprung to the door and was locking it; that was an anguished moment for every one there except Joseph Leroux. M. Joseph Leroux was scanning the face of M. de Grandemaison keenly. "You punished him, did you, sir?" he was saying. "You did justice on him, eh? You throttled him, didn't you?"

And then, his back to the door and his face full of woe, for he had heard the sobs of the girl who was dearer to him than all else, Dick Stewart growled, "Confound you, you hound! He didn't—he didn't throttle him!"

"Who did, then?" said the detective coldly. "Who did, Monsieur Faldalaldo?" He was kneeling beside the corpse again, and examining the neck.

A minute, a strained and heavy minute, ticked away before Dick Stewart answered. He hated to do it, but for him that minute had been a period of swift thought, repugnant argument, and grudging decision. He hated his decision, but he made it. The knowledge of what his decision might mean was plain to his mind, but the sobs outside the door were audible. It was he himself, he thought, who had brought this terrible trouble upon the Grandemaçons. Had he not searched Consolata out and found her the Comte would never have been jealous, Consolata would never have been accused, and her father would

never have needed to do vengeance. Hot and bitter in Stewart's heart was hatred for the defamer, dead though the defamer now was ; had he himself heard the defamation he would himself have attacked the wretch, he knew. Consolata's father *had* done justice, and Consolata must be saved from the terrible trouble which would otherwise fall upon her by her father's arrest and the unjust vengeance of the Law. "It isn't equity!" he thought,—"*she* will be the sufferer!" Thus he reflected, and then he decided and spoke. He hated to have to do it; it would sound theatrical, he knew ; it would be a lie, and that mattered something ; it would mean prison and public odium, and that mattered rather more ; but that the girl he loved should be disgraced by the arrest of her father, and be broken in heart and spirit by the knowledge that her father had done murder, mattered more than all. So he answered the detective's question in a way the detective least of all expected. "Who did it, do you say? . . . I did it myself!"

The Abbé turned round hastily ; he had been kneeling beside the corpse again, examining it anew, and testing his first opinion.

"Stewart, Stewart!" he cried, "why do you say that! It is very noble of you, but . . . you needn't, Stewart,—I'm quite certain he died of——"

"I tell you *I* did it!" Dick Stewart said stubbornly. "M. de Grandemaison never touched him. . . . Of course I didn't mean to strangle him, quite, but. . . . Oh, confound you, Shott,—get out, get out!" For before the Abbé could remonstrate further, another voice had become audible ; through the window Mr. Robert Shott had come into the room.

Mr. Shott was very red in the face ; apparently Mr. Shott had been holding himself in as long as he could, and had not liked it. "'Tisn't ekity, blowed if it is!" said Mr. Shott. "You tole me not to let the old gent see me, sir!" said Mr. Shott. "Which I've been hiding in them bushes all the time. Begging your pardon, sir, it's a lie what you said! I see it all myself. I was waiting by apintment, as you knows, sir, and I see with my very own

eyes, I did! You couldn't ha' done it, not if you wanted to ever so much! I see it done with my very own eyes! Only I only thought it was a bit of a scrap, and didn't suppose as the poor chap was getting it dead!"

"Confound you! Hold your tongue!" Dick Stewart had shouted twice, while this long speech of Mr. Shott's was going on, but he had shouted in vain. Now, however, running at Mr. Shott, and pushing the packet of banknotes into Mr. Shott's hand, "Be off, can't you?" he whispered. "Cut away at once, and hide! There's your money—Confound you, can't you see I *like* to say I did it?" he whispered; both of them in English all the while.

Meantime the Abbé was explaining to the detective. "Mr. Stewart thinks he is saving M. de Grandemaison. There is no need. Neither of them did it. The Comte died of cardiac epilepsy—paralysis of the cardiac centre. I am a doctor, and I swear to it. As a surgeon I will prove it. . . . Stewart, we shall not forget this, it is very noble of you, but there was no need. The Comte wasn't killed by anybody. He died of his disease."

"Maybe, maybe," said Joseph Leroux. "We shall see. We shall see what the doctor says when he comes. Meanwhile, if you please, sir. . . ." He had stepped up to Dick Stewart, there was an adroit movement and a click; and, looking down, Dick Stewart saw his wrists braceleted by a thin chain of steel. . . .

XLIII

AT ten o'clock on a bright morning in April Dick Stewart sat waiting for his morning meal. The meal was late in coming; it was an hour late, he considered. They had been rather neglectful of him recently; Bodinton had not been to see him for nearly a month, that would be why.

Dick Stewart sat waiting on a very uncomfortable seat, and when he rose and walked about, to kill the time, he found the room he occupied to be quite unreasonably small. A room like that might reasonably be quite large, he reflected; he thought that for at least the hundredth time, as he paced the room for at least the hundredth thousandth.

One good thing about the room was that people could not stare at you in it, however; last August and September people had stared at him a precious lot too much. And when your appearance was so changed—when your costume was so peculiar and your hair would have horrified Truefitt—it was just as well that people should not see you much. He remembered hinting that to Frenchy, the last time Frenchy came. Perhaps that was why he had stayed away for quite a month.

Several months had gone by since Dick Stewart left Château Royal—nearly eight months, in point of fact. Nearly the whole of one of these months had been taken up by the interminable forms and intolerable *tohu-bohu* of a French process-at-law. Law! The region of Temple Bar could show something bad enough in that respect, but what would Robert Shott have thought of a process-at-law in the Limousin? Jabber, forms, and noisy excitement; it had been quite a comfort to get that over; to get away to a place where quiet and privacy could be had was very welcome at first, no matter how small the place or intense

the quietude. The jabber and fuss of Blain the village doctor, when Dupont had found him and brought him to the château workshop that day eight ages ago ! The jabber and fuss of the *juge de paix* and the *juge d'instruction*, and then of all the other *juges*, the red-capped and mantled ones ! Bodinton's fuss, too—Dick Stewart had even tired of Bodinton. "Though he meant well, and did well, poor old Frenchy, hurrying down from Paris and cut up as he was !" Dick Stewart now thought. "Things might have gone a good deal worse, but for Frenchy. But for Frenchy that confounded fellow Leroux might have scored after all !"

Stewart passed his finger-tips over his chin and cheeks ; yes, they needed shaving quite badly. And a bath—oh, great heavens above, how he longed for a bath ! "Good thing nobody can stare in through the window at me !" he thought ; and he shivered a little when he thought that, for there had been too much looking in through windows at Château Royal, that damnable day last August. Shott had stared in ; so had Leroux, confound him ! If there had been no peeping and interfering Leroux there might have been hardly any trouble at all : Archange would have convinced the doctor that the poor bounder died of epilepsy, the *grand mal*, and then. . . . Oh, confound that village doctor too, fussy and pompous ass ! aspiring to represent his district in Parliament and glad of any fuss which would advertise his incorruptible and truly Roman republican zeal ! Of course the poor bounder *did* die of his *grand mal*, and not of the squeezing grip of anybody. If the village doctor would have said so, all the *tohu-bohu* of French law would have said so too. And then . . .

As for the peeping Shott, he must have cleared away with the two hundred and fifty pounds pretty cleverly, as well as swiftly ; for even the great Leroux had failed to find him, in the Limousin at first and afterwards at Boulogne. Good thing, too, Dick Stewart reflected ; for if Shott had been found and caused to give evidence, things would have gone hard with the poor old peacock. Poor M. de Grandemaison, Dick Stewart could pity him still. Poor old Sire ! Dick Stewart felt no resentment, he could understand him ;

not even at the last had Dick Stewart expected him to confess. M. de Grandemaison wished to keep in full his daughter's affection, if he could not retain his nephew's loyal esteem. For M. de Grandemaison to have confessed that his were the finger-marks would have been more difficult in the end than at the beginning. He wished to retain his daughter's love, and—it was here that Stewart could approve him most—to keep his daughter's name out of the *tohu-bohu* altogether. A good reason, that, why he should let the young sir's self-accusation go uncontradicted. And, beyond that, M. de Grandemaison had not been himself; he had lived through all the month of *tohu-bohu* in a lethargic and almost silent state. The Comte had insulted him—"Us!" he had said, not mentioning his daughter's name; and therefore the young sir had quite properly assaulted the Comte. That was all the evidence which he could give, he said. The shock of witnessing the assault and the terrible death had caused the old man's lethargy, the lawyer people thought. And Consolata thought so, too. Consolata had not learned all the truth of the matter. She could weep over Stewart's departure, be grateful to him for defending her name, and love her father still.

"Ah well, I've saved her from the bitterest sorrow she could feel," Dick Stewart reflected proudly, as he glanced round the little room in which he sat waiting for breakfast. He had done it for her, all for her. A stupid rotten thing to do, no doubt, had he considered himself only, but . . . anyhow, Consolata had been spared the worst pang. Sweetly she had thanked him, tearfully she had blessed him for vindicating her and yet letting the aspersion on her die with the dead man; she had been told that much, but not the full truth; she never guessed that the blue marks on the dead man's neck, of which the *tohu-bohu* people made so much at the inquiry and the trial, had been marks made by her father's fingers, his murderous fingers, fingers that were meant to kill, though they did not actually cause the death. And of course Archange would never tell her the truth. Archange knew it, Archange understood, Archange had thanked him and blessed him for taking upon his own young shoulders the weight that would

have crushed the old gentleman's, and crushed the heart of Consolata too. Archange's medical knowledge assured him that the assault on the Comte had precipitated and aggravated the attack of cardiac epilepsy; except for the assault it might not have been cardiac and, just possibly, the Comte might now be alive. "I suppose I ought to wish he was," Dick Stewart mused. "But I can't. He was such a bounder! I knew he was, first time I saw him. Archange said he wasn't, but I knew better. Nobody but a bounder would have been in such a hurry to think the worst of"—his face contracted—"the sweetest girl alive."

Leroux guessed the truth, too, and that seemed to Stewart the best of the whole matter. He had never forgiven the great Joseph Leroux for fooling him, play-acting the Pied-de-nez, and using an Englishman for a French policeman's purposes of *espionage*. And Leroux knew that M. Stoo-ar knew that Leroux knew, which to Leroux seemed the worst of the whole matter. Leroux had felt himself beaten. Leroux had hunted everywhere for Shott, because he guessed that Shott could disprove Stewart's self-accusation. If Leroux could have fixed the guilt on M. de Grandemaison it would have been a triumph of professional pride; but if he could have cleared Dick Stewart it would have been a salve to wounded self-conceit. As it was, however, Shott refusing to be found and M. de Grandemaison to confess, Stewart's self-accusation stood good, and Leroux felt himself doubly beaten. "You are a fool, M'sieur Stoo-ar," Leroux had said. "Maybe, maybe," had been the answer. "But I've scored against Pied-de-nez this time, you impertinent beggar!"

Dick Stewart had scored the point at his own expense, however. "Fool of a thing to do, no doubt—stupid and Quixotic and all that, but. . . I've spared you, Consolata!" Something very much like tears stood in his eyes at that moment, blurring their far-away look that had been seeing right back to Château Royal and all the immediate past. He knew that what he had done for Consolata, all for Consolata, had set him farther off from her than ever. "'Tisn't ekity, but it's law and convention," he said grimly. "The old gentleman would never consent to our marriage, now,

even if Consolata herself would consent, and I've never told her I love her, yet!" The old gentleman would regard what the young sir had done for them as quite a natural loyal service due to Royalty, and requiring no reward. The old gentleman would not be likely to regret his own share in the Comte's ending. Had not a king the power of dispensing death? "He'll be peacocking more than ever now—now that a poor wretch has paid the penalty of high treason!"

Then Stewart winced and burned, as he thought of the last and worst cause for his hopelessness of ever winning Consolata's hand. How could a Consolata de Grandemaison, not to say an Antoinette-Marie-Consolata de Bourbon, Madame Royale de France, consent to wed a Mr. George Stuart—he had concealed his true name at the trial, so that his friends in England might not know—a Mr. Stuart found guilty of homicidal assault and sent for fourteen months to Limoges gaol? Fourteen months! Fourteen days or fourteen hours, it was all the same in one respect; he had been tried, condemned and imprisoned, an indelible mark of shame. That he had been acquitted of murder itself meant little; that the autopsy had shown the real cause of the Comte's death to be epilepsy and failure of the heart did not remove him from the reach of the law or exonerate him from the prisoner's shame. He had been tried, sentenced, and imprisoned. "I'm a gaol-bird," he muttered now. "Consolata de Grandemaison could never marry a gaol-bird! She'll be thinking of me with horror now, no matter how she thought of me and thanked me before I was taken to gaol."

Fourteen months! Lucky he had been to get off with so little, Leroux had told him, for there is no distinction drawn between murder and manslaughter in France. He had been found guilty of homicidal assault, on his own confession of it, and the assault had been found guilty of expediting and aggravating the Comte's attack of epilepsy, and of instigating, so to speak, the death. Fourteen years the sentence might have been, but for the efforts of Archange and Bodinton and their insistence on the evidence of the autopsy. Fourteen months! And only seven of the months gone yet.

Thus Stewart mused as he waited, waited, waited, hunger beginning to irritate him towards the end. The end came suddenly, however; steps were heard in the corridor outside his cell, the shutter of the *grille* was shot back, a key clicked smartly, the door came open, and "Breakfast at last, eh?" the prisoner growled at the entering warder. "You've been a dence of a time with it, man!"

But it was not breakfast that entered, even now. It was the Governor of the prison, it was also the great Joseph Leroux; it was Bodinton, moreover—Frenchy, Frenchy clasping and hugging the prisoner, and then feeling ashamed and trying to be English; it was also Abbé Archange. And "Sir, I consider you a hero," the old Governor was saying. And "Sir, I respect your respect for gray hairs!" And "Sir, will you do me the honour to breakfast with me? I have the distinguished pleasure and duty to announce to you that you are free!"

And Archange was gripping his hand in silence; and Bodinton was shouting "Topping, simply topping, old man! We've got you out at last! You thought I'd cut you, didn't you? But no, we've been so busy about you this last month, and daren't be sure we could do it, that was why. Come on, come out of this hole, come on downstairs, come to civilization again! And I say, old chappie, let's give it Winchester fashion. Governor, join in! Now, Abbé! One-two-three—*Hooray!*"

And then it was the turn of Abbé Archange. "By-and-by we will show you what we think of you, Stewart. I bring you my cousin's loving gratitude," he whispered. "You care for her still?"

"Care for——? Great heavens above, I should think I do!" Dick Stewart did not whisper, he shouted that.

And then it was Joseph Leroux who said, "M'sieur Stoo-ar, I said you are a fool, but from what I now hear I'm not so sure of it as I was." Then the warder touched his cap, and the others filed out, Dick Stewart standing in the doorway a moment, to look round the cramped little room with new eyes, incredulous that he could have dwelt in it so long or at all. He did not understand why and

how he was free, but free he was, and he could snap his fingers again at the "Va pas!" of the signpost and the "Viens pas!" of the feudal arch. In spite of their warnings he had sought and found the violet sapphires; he had been privileged to serve and suffer, for her, all for her; and now the law seemed to be proving itself equity, and he was a free and vindicated man.

"First thing I want, old Frenchy," he said as he went downstairs, "is breakfast, breakfast! Fish, bifteck, bacon, something, anything—something to eat, to *eat*! Feed me, feed me well at once—I'm hungrier than any hunter, I'm hollower than any drum!"

"Ah, but that's topping again, perfectly topping!" he said, half an hour later, as across the breakfast table he sent the first whiffs from a cigarette. "Governor, do you know what's the worst thing you do to your patients? It's the cutting them off their smoke! Yes, give me your case, give me the lot, old Bodinton! So you found Robert Shott, did you, good chap? Ah yes, you and Pied-de-nez together, of course. . . . And M. de Grandemaison is dead, is he, Archange? Poor old gentleman! Dead nearly a month, and confessed, and you never let me know a word? Oh yes, of course, I understand you weren't certain that the law. . . . But, poor old gentleman! Heart, was it? I liked him, you know. I was proud to screen him, point of fact. Thought myself an ass, when I'd done it, at first: but not after a bit, when I could see what I'd spared him and . . . all of you, you know . . . Archange, tell me, how does your cousin bear it? I hope Mademoiselle does not know that—that her father—oh, *you* understand!"

"M. de Grandemaison told her what you had done for him," the Abbé said. "A week before he died. My cousin was very brave over it. It was she who persuaded him to—to make an affidavit, as you say in England."

"And the affidavit got you out, old man?" Bodinton cried. "That and Shott's deposition taken together. We found Shott at Boulogne easy enough, the second time we looked for him. He'd been in England six months, on ekity business, he said. Fine fellow, Shott!"

"M'sieur Shott does not highly think of your English law and police, M'sieur Stoo-ar," said Joseph Leroux.

"You will be pleased to learn that I have the highest possible opinion of yours," Dick Stewart said stiffly. "Monsieur Pied-de-nez, I trust we may never meet again. If you have quite breakfasted I will bid you good morning and good-bye. . . . Governor, you have been the square thing to me, I thank you, but if you will permit me, I will now say adieu. . . . Bodinton, take me off to a barber's and a bath, and then an English tailor's. Oh, and you can advance me a thousand francs till I cash a cheque. Archange, you come with us, don't you? I hope you do."

"Of course I come with you!" the Abbé said. "I am to take you back to the château. Do you think we could let you enjoy your first freedom anywhere else? We will catch the night train, Stewart, if M. Bodinton and the tailor can spare you by then. . . ."

The night-train swung and clattered along its devious and tedious way, but Dick Stewart slept soundly and happily all the while. Outside the railway station at Limoges an automobile waited, its brass-work gleaming in the lovely April dawn.

"What?" cried Dick Stewart, "that you, Dupont?"

"We kept him on," the Abbé explained, as Dupont came towards his master embracingly. Yes, it was the same machine, the same chauffeur, the same wild hilly route as before, and the pace was urged as much as ever.

"Faster, man!" Dick Stewart kept on saying. "Now then, top power for this hill!"

Yet he could not know to what reception he went. The Abbé had kept counsel, the Abbé had hardly mentioned Consolata's name.

"Does Mademoiselle—I mean Madame Royale—expect us?" Stewart had asked.

"My cousin expects us," the Abbé had answered. "But we will not call her Madame Royale any more, Stewart—we have abandoned our rank for a time." And that was all the Abbé had said about the sweetest girl alive.

"Of course she will be mourning, sorrowing for a father

only a month dead," Dick Stewart reflected as they came near Lustrac. "Really, I don't suppose I ought to intrude on her now. . . . Wish I hadn't come, point of fact—the place will be like a tomb!"

Yet the place was bright with sunshine and the terrace was gay with spring flowers when the automobile went slackening in under the arch. Tan barked a welcome, wagged a furious tail, and jumped up and down in frantic delight. And there on the terrace was Consolata, divinely fair in her crape, and there too was Bonne. Bonne rushed at the automobile, seized Stewart as he was stepping out, and hugged him like a mother. He smiled, he patted her shoulder, and put her aside. Then, shaking, he mounted to the terrace, stooped above a trembling little hand, touched it with his lips, and looked up into the half-veiled eyes which he had followed so far through so much. There was silence between and around them. Then the Abbé spoke.

"Stewart, do you love my cousin?"

"Do I *what*?"

The Abbé smiled. "Do you ask her in marriage?"

The terrace seemed to reel. "I do! God knows I do?"

"Then kiss her, kiss her, Mr. Fancy Bendick, sir!" cried Bonne, all joyous and tearful and dancing.

And the Abbé said, "Stewart, won't you kiss your betrothed?"

THE END